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"Hair-raising adventure..."
—Oakland Tribune

LADY IN BONDAGE

(Original Title: BLACK ANGELS)

C. T. RITCHIE

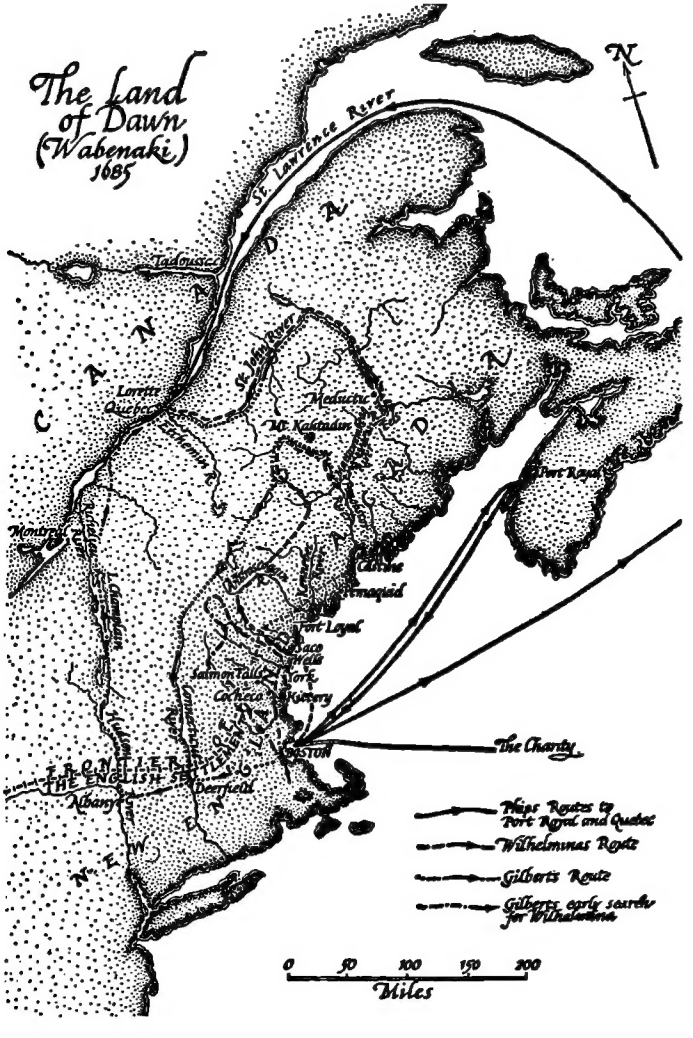
Complete & Unabridged

SLAVE OF THE MOHAWKS

Captain Vetch had hanged the rest of the rebel Roebury family and now he had the trembling young girl Wilhelmina in his power. He liked a pretty wench as well as any of his rough soldiers, but he knew that after he'd sated his lust he'd have to hang her too. Only in that way could he secure his hold on the Roebury estate.

It was at that point that the girl was snatched from him by the arrival of her betrothed, Gilbert of Axford. The resulting flight, their escape from England by ship, and the horror of their subsequent betrayal make LADY IN BONDAGE a fast-moving, often shocking, but always authentic historical adventure.

For Wilhelmina found herself a slave girl in the New World, captive of brutal white and savage redskin alike, while her lover began the long desperate search to save her.


The Land of Dawn (Wabenaki) 1685
St. Lawrence River
Tadoussac
Lorette
Quebec
St. John River
Medoctec
Mt. Katadin
Penobscot R.
Kennebec R.
Port Royal
Montreal
Chaudiere R.
Connecticut R.
Chibouc
Penaquid
Fort Loyal
Saco
Wells
Salmon Falls
York
Cocheco
Kittery
Piscataqua R.
Merrimack R.
BOSTON
The Charity
FRONTIER SETTLEMENTS OF THE ENGLISH
Deerfield
Albany
Hudson R.
N. E. W
Ships Routes to Port Royal and Quebec
Wilhelmnas Route
Gilberts Route
Gilberts early search for Wilhelmina
0 50 100 150 200
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LADY IN BONDAGE

Original Title: Black Angels

by

C. T. RITCHIE

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LADY IN BONDAGE (BLACK ANGELS)

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To one who cherishes the gold seal
this book is dedicated

Foreword

Not all of this story came to the author by way of Jem's descendants. Parts of it, especially the details of day-to-day events and the precise expressions of thought and action, are derived from the author's imagination supported by historical records of the period. Great care has been taken to conceal the identity of leading characters, and if their fictitious names correspond with those of real people it is pure coincidence.

The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of innumerable librarians and historians. Special thanks are due to Miss Margaret Evans, Frank G. Speck, Joseph Cotton, Henry Lorne Masta, and Montague Chamberlain.

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Chapter I

No MAN least of all the son of a nobleman, should have ventured out of doors on that September night of 1685. The Lambs were prowling, and young Axford well knew that a lone horseman could expect no quarter from those rapacious soldiers. In the West Country those darlings of King James were bent on hanging the last of the scattered rebels. Gilbert of Axford knew it, and yet all the warnings of his outlawed friends had not dissuaded him from pressing on toward Roebury.

He spurred his mount to a swifter gallop. For another mile of darkness there was an irregular clopping that told of a horseshoe cast somewhere back there on the road, and then the pace slackened despite the rider's words. The mare was jaded after the long marches with Monmouth, and today she had been ridden hard all the way from the New Forest with scarcely a pause in the familiar stable at Axford. Only when the spurs raked her flanks again did she lengthen her stride. For a while the froth on her neck and withers flaked off in the breeze. They were taking a bend in the road when the mare shied and whinnied. Gilbert reined in, stood up in the stirrups, and peered over her erect ears into the darkness ahead. He heard nothing, saw nothing, but the quivering mare was not one to shy at a shadow, and Gilbert listened during breathless minutes, ready to wheel and gallop away at the first footfall or glint of pike.

"There, Jenny," he whispered. "It's nothing." He spurred her gently and breathed easier as she responded with a forward lurch. "Maybe a wild beast," he thought, reasoning that the danger was past. Instantly he changed his mind as the mare halted short.

This time he heard it too. The night wind came in a stronger gust, and with it a faint clacking like the sound of a windmill's broken sails. He guessed what it was—a hanged rebel. The mare pranced sidewise, her hoofs scattering lumps of hardened chalk, and her neck arching toward the dangling corpse as they drew near. Held together by chains, the bones were picked bare. Not a single crow roosted on the gibbet.

"On, Jenny! On! It's only another of us. Come, girl!"

The mare responded to raking spurs. Gilbert forced her to pass the hanging skeleton, and then he was away, rocking in the saddle while the mare galloped hard toward Roebury.

For an hour there was that rhythmic clopping, broken only thrice as he impatiently walked the spent animal; and then caution overcame anxiety, and he drew more rein, proceeding alertly through the outskirts of the village. All was dark. Not a candle burned in the nearest windows. In the distance the vague towers of Roebury Manor abutted the dark sky. Was that faint sheen from the hidden moon? Or from a candle in a window? Wilhelmina's quarters were there, midway between the towers. Yes, a candle. He was sure now, sure that she was still alive. But the others? Her father and brothers? Yes, lights in the great hall! Why, nothing was amiss after all!

Much relieved, Gilbert took a deep breath. His chest still thumped like a hollow drum, but the suffocating tension was gone. Yet he knew better than to race over this last half mile as he had been wont to do in the days before the rebellion. Could it be only four months ago? It seemed an age since he had ridden off with the Roeburys to join Monmouth at Lyme. Urging his mount forward, he tried to for-

get Monmouth's triumphant march through Somerset, the battle in the fogs of Sedgemoor, and their leader's disgraceful flight from the field. Had it not been for that defeat the outcome of the rebellion might have been different, and the tyrant, King James, might now be rotting under the sod.

Roebury Manor came into view again. It looked cheerful in the distance, set there against the clearing sky and touched with moonlight. He watched it as his progress made it disappear and reappear beyond the village roofs, and then he checked the mare abruptly. The shock of the sight chilled him as would a sudden draught. He shook his head as if to clear away an incredible illusion and looked again. The distant manor was still there, but in the foreground a rectangular scaffold enclosed it like the frame of a painting. And from the crossbar hung five men, their heads canted aside and their bodies slowly turning in the breeze, all silhouetted against the glow from the great hall of Roebury Manor.

He knew who they were. There was no need to tether the shying mare and run to the gallows, no need to look up at those dead faces and murmur their names, but he did: "John, William, Arthur, Sir John Roebury himself—and Jem." That last name brought a gasp from his lips. "Before heaven!" he cried aloud. "Not Jem, not poor Jem too!"

But it was Jem indeed, young Jem who had stayed home with Wilhelmina when her father and brothers had ridden off in June. Emotion choked Gilbert as he stared at the boy's limp form, at the drooping shoulders, at the bare toes pointing to the ground.

Gilbert turned away and glared at the lights of the great hall across the fields. Higher up a feeble light seemed to beckon from an upper window. Presently fear for Wilhelmina surpassed his anger, and leaving the tethered mare, he strode toward the manor. Now and again a cloud hid the moon. During a minute of darkness he ran across an open field, and then crawled through the wall of holly and bramble

that enclosed the grounds. The stables were on his right. Thuds of hoofs on the floor told him that horses were there for the taking, but he turned away, stealing toward the great hall. He kept well to the shadows of the manor, for two guards were posted beside the front entrance. Light from the great hall sparkled on the backs of their cuirasses as they stood facing the darkness. Gilbert crept toward them, hiding himself in the bushes whenever a guard shifted from one foot to the other. As he neared the window, hearing the coarse laughs within and remembering the Roeburys, a nauseous emptiness overcame him, and for some time he could not move. Only when the rough voices angered him anew did he creep beneath the window, and even then the high sill prevented him from peering in. He tested a creeper that ripped away from the mortar. The tearing sound warned him to flatten against the wall as the guards looked toward him. One of them stalked nearer, his pike tilting forward, but the other's taunt, "Jump to a cat's scratchin', must ye!" brought the suspicious guard back to his station.

Impressed with the danger of his situation, Gilbert withdrew cautiously, making his way to a grove. For a while he stood silently looking up at the lighted window where Wilhelmina must be a prisoner awaiting the will of her captors. Then a plan of action came to mind, and in half an hour two fresh horses were saddled and hitched to an oak in the grove. They might whinny, Gilbert thought as he looked down the shaft of the old well, but that risk must be taken while the officers were still carousing in the great hall.

Chapter 2

THE OFFICERS were indeed carousing. Wine flowed in quantities such as the stern eyes of the Prince of Orange, looking down from the portrait, had never before witnessed, nor, for that matter, were apt to continue witnessing if any one of the revelers spied the likeness of a prince who might one day attempt, as Monmouth had already attempted, to invade England and overthrow despotic King James. But all were oblivious of the stern face on the wall above them, and so it remained there, frowning upon the excesses of soldiers and judges alike.

If the portrait's eyes could have come alive they would have stared, not at the subalterns already too far gone in their cups to reach for more, not at those who still gambled and laughed or cursed their luck, but at the two men facing each other across a corner of the long oak table. The one in the scarlet robe was Sir George Jeffreys, Lord Chief Justice of England. The other was Silas Vetch, captain of the Lambs.

Although the judge's chin was resting on the table, he was not yet too drunk to eye the leather pouch that clinked as the captain dropped it on a dry space among the glasses. "Ho," he grunted, his breath causing the puddle of wine under his chin to shimmer in the candlelight. "The consideration, eh?"

"A hundred pounds, my lord. And now Roebury is mine?"

"Consider it so, Captain Vetch. A mere formality now." Judge Jeffreys' eyes rolled upwards and reflected the yellow light through his bristling eyebrows. "Yes, King James will reward you fittingly. The Privy Seal—mine. And Roebury

Manor—yours." He watched the officer's lips stretching like a pair of swimming leeches, and then his gaze lowered covetously to the pouch on the table. "Ah, yes," he chuckled deep in his throat while dragging the folds of his scarlet robe in the spilled wine as he reached for the gold. "This pittance . . . ? Equal payments till the debt is paid?"

"As we agreed. A hundred pounds for each Roebury. Five hundred in all. You drove a stiff bargain, my lord, since all but the boy were rebels anyway."

"Innocent? The boy?" The judge pushed himself upright in his chair and scowled darkly under his powdered wig. "Had I known that, Vetch, you would have paid more dearly." He studied the captain's face at some length; searching into those glinting eyes for the hitherto unnoticed cleverness that must lie beneath their glaze. Until this minute he had despised Vetch, had loathed the narrow bone that showed white under the taut skin of his nose, but now he felt a growing admiration for this officer who had revealed a talent equal to his own. Two years of service under the notorious Kirke in Morocco had taught Vetch more than the rudiments of exploitation. It would be wise, thought Jeffreys, to cultivate this promising acquaintance. "A health to the new Lord of Roebury," he said aloud, winking and reaching for the bottle of canary.

"To the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal," said Vetch, quick to remind Jeffreys of the expected appointment. "And if ever a man deserved it for vigorous services, that man is you, my lord."

"Indeed," boasted the judge, pouring with an unsteady hand. "In just two months I've condemned more traitors than all my predecessors together since the Conquest."

"And I've hanged 'em. But there's one more traitor in need of hanging, my lord—the Lady Wilhelmina."

"What? That child, man? On what charge? And why?"

"The charge? Sheltering rebels—her father and brothers.

Trump up anything, my lord, but convict her in the morning. The reason? It's plain enough if you recall her mother. Remember? Or does her kinship with the Prince of Orange elude you?"

"Orange? Ah, yes. A cousin, so it seems. But how does that bear on this business?"

"Only this, my lord: If the Prince ever invades England and succeeds where Monmouth failed—what then? What if James is dethroned? Who would shield us then? No, my lord, I'll have no claimant waiting to snatch Roebury out of my hands. The girl must die—and die attainted of treason."

The judge laughed. "Orange? Cross from Holland? Preposterous, man." In spite of his laugh Sir George Jeffreys was shaken. The recollection of his own bloody works was for a moment coupled in his mind with the possible uprising of an outraged populace, and he shuddered, wondering where he might hide, how he might disguise himself by shaving off his heavy eyebrows and dressing like a coal miner. He drained his wineglass and peered through its bottom at the captain's distorted face. Seen through the glass it was an ugly face, its nostrils expanding almost to its ears and its eyes merging into one. The ugliness distracted Jeffreys from thoughts of Orange, and a returning sense of power flooded over him as he fancied himself even more shrewd than this rogue whose cunning he had admired only a minute ago. He lowered the glass and thoughtfully tapped it on the table before naming his terms: "A thousand pounds."

Vetch hesitated, sipping his wine and calculating. Although he would hold title to these lands as long as the reigning king decreed, there was a chance that a usurper might restore Roebury Manor to the girl. He looked at Jeffreys again, saw the hard lines in that gloating face, and knew that the judge would not yield a pound. "So be it," he agreed. "At the morning session, then? You condemn the girl?"

One of the lawyers farther along the table lifted an eye-

brow and leaned closer. "The Lady Wilhelmina? To be tried? Why Captain! After what you told me this day I doubt you've the heart to. . . ."

"Eh?" Breaking in, Jeffreys was all attention. "Eh? What was said?"

"Why, my lord, he promised to free her brothers on condition that she. . . ."

"So!" laughed Jeffreys. "Vetch, you amaze even me. Promised the lady, eh? And now you go up to claim your reward? Better hurry, Captain. You'll find her ill-disposed to grant it after sunrise when she views the gallows from her window. Was there ever such a rogue? Promised the lady! By the rood, Vetch, I envy you your cunning and your vigor. The guards up there, I take it, are to be trusted?" Jeffreys laughed again. "What a pity, gentlemen, if our good captain finds his true-love fouled beforehand."

"Fouled? My lambs know better. I've drawn and quartered men for a lesser offense. In Tangiers, my lord, I burned a guard for lifting a virgin's veil." Vetch was boasting, for in truth that execution had been ordered by his superior, Colonel Kirke, but now he delighted in the coarse applause. "So, my lord, I've no need to hurry on that score."

Nevertheless he glanced at the stairway and quickly emptied his glass, scarcely tasting the wine as his thoughts sped upward to the Lady Wilhelmina.

Chapter 3

THE LADY WILHELMINA started, whirled toward the door, and stared at the oak panels. She froze like an alarmed fawn,

uncertain whether to stand or run. The blood drained from beneath the tan her face had acquired during a summer of watching for her absent brothers. For a full minute of terror she held her breath, and even then her first gasp was as constricted as a stifled sob. Presently her clenched fingers opened again, her fixed eyes came alive, and her bosom assumed a regular if abnormal heaving.

That creak she had heard at the door? "Only a guard leaning his back against it," she told herself, moving her lips but making no sound. "When the door rattles again it will mean the guard is standing at attention. It will mean Captain Vetch is coming, and then. . . ."

She took a step toward the bench and then hesitated, for the thought of escaping was like a lash across her eyes. The burning tears came again as she imagined how her father and brothers would be hanged if she rejected the captain's terms, and remorse overwhelmed her as completely as if she had already deserted her men. "No. I *must* stay. I *will* stay."

But the thought of surrendering to Captain Vetch was unnerving. She ran to the bench against the outside wall, threw the cushions and drapery aside, and lifted the hinged seat. Her fingers were hooked in the ringbolt of the hatch in the floor under the bench before the consequences of escape stormed back into her mind. Her father. Her brothers. All, all except little Jem would be hanged. Captain Vetch had assured her of that, and his voice had been hard, so hard that his lips had not writhed at the corners but had stiffened like frozen worms. Even as Wilhelmina remembered the threat she bent low and lifted the hatch and looked down into the cavity beneath the floor. It was dark, but she knew that the cubicle adjoined a hollow buttress set with iron rungs. Although an up-draught touched her hot face, she shivered not because the air was cool and damp but because she was on the point of deserting her brothers.

"No! No!" she cried aloud. Her choked voice was thick

with strange tones that came back up the shaft like the sobs of babes. "They mustn't die."

She began pacing back and forth between the window niche and the door. Movement in the oak-framed mirror arrested her, and she stared in alarm at her full length reflection, at a wild-eyed face half hidden by disordered black hair, and at a slender body trembling under the layers of her gown. A pannier at her hip had unhooked. She looped it up hurriedly, but it was the ornament dangling from a gold chain in front of her tightly laced bodice that held her attention and stirred up a memory so sharp that she forgot her appearance. The gold pendant had been her mother's. It was a seal, the upper part in the shape of a bluebell, its petals holding the lower device. She turned it upside down, but her watering eyes could not distinguish between the sheaf of wheat and the windmill. Even the initials of Wilhelmina de Baux soon blurred, the W running into the B, and then the entire seal diminished to a yellow sparkle.

The silent tears came quickly now, for she was remembering her mother's last words on that day two years ago when the lady was dying. "Keep it, Mina—keep it always." Although the wards had been spoken gaily, Wilhelmina had guessed that it was the end, and bursting into tears, she had heard only part of the seal's history. Only this she remembered: If she ever needed a friend she had but to present the seal to the Prince of Orange. She shook her head, dislodging the teardrops and then drying the trickles on her cheeks. The seal was useless now, for the Prince was in faraway Holland and could not protect her brothers. Their safety depended on her, not on the Prince of Orange.

"On me," she thought. Suddenly she was doing her hair before the mirror. Soon the black curls were falling wide and loose over her shoulders. Then she sat down on the bed, her body assuming the rigidity of a marble statue. Her grey eyes, the only apparently living part of her, stared fixedly at the

bolted door. So intent was she that even the sound of jackboots clicking on rusty iron rungs failed to disturb her until Gilbert of Axford was listening silently in the cavity beneath the bench. It was the silence, as suddenly noticeable as the stopping of a clock, that caught her attention and made her conscious of recent sounds.

What had caused them? As quickly as she asked the question she found a possible explanation: The hatch was open, and someone was dropping pebbles into the old well exactly as Jem and Gilbert had done last summer when they had discovered the passage. She had laughed at the hollow sound of their voices, and they had answered and followed her laugh down the old well, through the passage under the garden, and up the hollow buttress. She had threatened to empty the inkhorn on them and they had retreated. The memory of it startled her afresh. Gilbert and Jem! Nobody else knew of the passage. Could it be?

She ran to the bench and looked down into the hole. His blond hair was visible even in the darkness.

"Gil!"

"Mina!" His hushed voice quivered with emotion. "Hurry!"

"Hurry?" He was closer now, his hands hooked over the side of the bench and his face upturned, so near that she could stretch down and kiss him if she chose. She wanted to kiss him farewell, before he learned of her tryst with Captain Vetch and despised her. "But Gil—I stay." She saw his blue eyes, eyes so blue that even the yellow light could not turn them green, filling with bewilderment. "Gil, please. They're at the door. Gilbert, is Jem with you?"

"I'm alone. Quick, Mina! Before they find the horses."

A lock of her black hair fell to his face. She bent lower and kissed his cheek. Somewhere he had shaved, for the down of four months ago was gone.

"Oh Gil, you make it hard for me. My brothers . . . To-

morrow they hang unless . . . Gilbert, I am promised to Captain Vetch."

"Blessed Virgin!" He couldn't tell her yet. Only when they were hiding on the downs would he tell her of the executions. "Mina, a Lamb's vow is worthless. He'll hang them anyway! Quick! Into your riding habit. First we go to Axford. A change of horses. Then on to the coast—through the New Forest. We've a boat—seven of us. We'll cross the Channel and. . . ." Even Gilbert heard the insistent knocking at the door now; and desperation, for she hesitated still, forced his blunt words: "Jem is dead—your father—all."

"Dead?"

In her stricken eyes was naught but the pain that comes of bereavement. She must have dreaded such news, even expected such news, for her credence was as total as her grief. But Gilbert could spare no time for commiseration. In that moment of emergency, in that moment while he climbed out of the bench and raced to the shattering door, he shouted only urgent commands:

"The passage, Mina! Into it! Go as far as you can." Hearing another splintering blow at the door, he doubted that he would be able to follow and overtake her. "Hurry!" he added, drawing his sword. "Horses—in the grove. Mount and away."

"To Axford?"

A third splintering crash drowned his answer, and he saw the blade of a halberd protruding through a panel. It withdrew, but instantly another blade pierced the thick wood. Blow after blow hacked a gaping hole. After stabbing through the jagged aperture, Gilbert retrieved his sword quickly enough to save the blade but failed to avoid the thrust of a pike which severed a strap of his scabbard—now a cumbersome thing that might impede his flight. He unbuckled his belt, discarding the harness as he turned, for the shattered door was tilting inwards. It crashed to the floor behind him as he ran, and now, descending into the hatchway, he

glimpsed Vetch and two Lambs bursting into the chamber.

"Axford!" The captain recognized him before his face dropped out of sight, but the accompanying threat was lost on Gilbert. Scrambling down the rungs, he heard hoarse shouts echoing in the shaft, and by the time his boots felt the bricks of the tunnel he was certain that men were already descending. Familiar with the passage, he doubled low and stumbled along its length, reaching the false well in time to see Wilhelmina on the highest rungs. He began climbing, but before he was out of the well a voice bellowed directly beneath him. The loud warning, Gilbert realized, would attract the guards outside the manor. He threw his legs over the brim of the well and looked for Wilhelmina, but she had vanished into the grove. Allowing her time to locate and mount a horse, he thrust his sword at the first climbing pursuer. The man remained out of reach, shouting urgently to the outer guards who were coming at a run when Gilbert turned and found Wilhelmina leading her white filly and Jem's hunter out of the grove.

"Mount," he cried, bounding toward her and silently praising her thoughtfulness. He saw her obey, saw also the guards racing near, and now he flung himself upon the hunter's saddle.

"This way!" He pointed toward the stables. "Through the brambles!"

The horses pivoted almost simultaneously, and then they were galloping across the enclosure, making for the downs. A fringe of holly and bramble intervened. Gilbert led the way, forcing the hunter into the dense September foliage. Wilhelmina followed close behind. Thorns tore at them as they plunged through, and then they were racing southward over the rolling fields.

Chapter 4

FLANK to flank the horses galloped, pounding the spongy turf of a pasture, splashing across a rocky brook, clattering over a stretch of barren chalk. They took the hedge together. They always took this hedge together in this same low place where the thorns were stunted by dragging hoofs. There was an instant of silence while their horses soared high and then a thunderous clapping as eight iron shoes pounded the earth again. They glanced at each other now, for it was back there that Gilbert's little mare, overburdened with two riders, had thrown them both. That was when they were children, long ago before the baron gave her the filly, but each remembered that tumble, that moment of lying together under the hedge, and those whispered promises. And then Jem, her twin brother who would never laugh again, had galloped up to tease them.

Gilbert met her glance and guessed her thought as she twisted farther in the saddle. "Don't look back," he warned, knowing that the sight of her home would only distress her the more. "To Axford, Mina! Axford and then the coast. Tomorrow night. . . ." Because of the plunging hoofs he was almost incoherent, and he raised his voice: "Aboard ship. For Holland."

She was wordless while they skirted the sear corn field, but when they raced through the unharvested wheat: "Gilbert, my gown! Torn!"

Ordinarily it was like her to think of such things. Often she would exclaim with pleasure when her father returned from the market-town with a bolt of damask or velvet. She

loved such finery, and even when they used to ride to hounds she was as like to lament the loss of a ribbon as much as the escape of the quarry. But now her cries were insincere. She was attempting to fortify her courage. "Gilbert—your sisters must dress me. Oh, what will they think!"

They took the second hedge, she in the lead because the path was narrow here, and he a length behind. It was the last hedge. The fields of Roebury changed into a sheepwalk, an undulating expanse of barren ground blotched with patches of furze and elders with ripening berries. Gilbert took the lead now that the unmarked way was treacherous with rabbit holes. Yet he could not slacken pace, for the post-road to Axford lay parallel with their course; and even now the Lambs, after mounting the Roebury horses, might be abreast. A misgiving shook him as might an ague. The Lambs would expect him to fly toward his home, toward Axford. Perhaps they would follow the road and warn the pikemen who, he knew from experience, were posted in groups here and there on the downs. The thought depressed him, for the ship now waiting on the coast would sail tomorrow night at dusk. Gilbert shuddered as he recalled his original plan to secure fresh horses at Axford in order to reach the ship on time. He looked over his shoulder, saw Wilhelmina bobbing close, and again faced the plain that was opening up before him like a swelling ocean, waves and all. The chalk hills were like crested whitecaps, the grasses like wind-lashed ripples. Salisbury Plain! By dawn, if all went well, they would arrive at the village. But in Axford there would be little time to rush Wilhelmina into a riding habit. She was always one to primp and comb, although tonight she had acted with agility. Now he found her pulling abreast and urging her filly as if she had guessed his thought.

"Gil, I heard something!"

"Where?" He reined in, retarding his horse a little.

"Behind. A shout—as if they follow close."

The grass was tall here, the hoof beats muffled swishes and thuds. Gilbert listened, holding his breath. He heard calls, the calls of a lone pursuer who had caught sight of Wilhelmina's white filly. Then came answering cries from left and right as if the Lambs were riding in a sweeping arc. Gilbert knew their methods. Like stag hunters they had fanned out, but now, relaying their halloos from one rider to the next, they would gang together and press after the sighted quarry.

"Mina! If they have your brothers' hunters. . . ." He hated himself for attempting to frighten her still more, but the need was great. The Lambs undoubtedly would have those hunters. The prides of Roebury, those better mounts had belonged to the older brothers and to the baron. And Wilhelmina's filly, selected by the baron for comfort rather than for speed, was no match for the hunters. Knowing it, Gilbert cursed himself for choosing Jem's and Wilhelmina's horses instead of the baron's swiftest. "Veer off to the right," he said, changing his naked sword to his left hand as the hunter nudged the filly's shoulder. He did not explain the strategy, but the new course would tend to string out the pursuers in a long line, one behind the other. "There! Sharp right in that vale!"

They plunged down into the hollow, and sure that they were hidden from the pursuers, angled westward. Minutes later they were far to the right, the white filly a conspicuous speck of motion climbing out of the valley. Or so Gilbert thought. He was sure the Lambs would rein to the right, would pursue a westerly course while they themselves, turning left behind the hill, would streak southward.

"This way," he cried almost exultantly, pointing with his gleaming sword.

As if in double harness the horses swerved around the shoulder of the hill, and once more the moon was in their eyes. The filly and hunter galloped wildly down the slope

and across the hollow as if they, not the riders, were the fugitives, and Gilbert found no need to spur them with his sword. And then, just as he sighted the black figures of footmen against the chalky ridge ahead, the hunter tumbled and rolled over with the sickening sounds of broken wind and snapping bones. Thrown forward and stunned, Gilbert saw the white filly hurtling past. He tried to warn Wilhelmina against rushing into the king's toil, but the tumble had robbed him of breath. It returned to him in laboring gasps only when she turned and came riding back.

"Oh Gil? Gil?"

"A burrow," he explained. "Ride, Mina. Around them, and then south again." The shouting footmen were pouring down the hillside. Some distance to the east, sheltered by the surrounding hills, their campfire was gleaming, blocking escape in that direction. Even as Gilbert looked he saw torches separating from the larger glow and fanning out as if the men at the camp were already answering the shouts of the footmen on the hill. "God speed you, Mina! Hurry!" He struck her filly, starting it off, but immediately she brought the animal around.

"I can't," she cried when he would have argued. "I can't, Gil. Not alone."

He did not know her real reason for sliding behind the saddle and begging him to mount. She might have preferred a few more minutes with him to an hour of freedom alone. He could not tell. He only knew that to argue would be to lose all, and so he leaped into the saddle, waited only until her arms were about his waist, and beat his sword against the filly's flank. The mount did her utmost, taking them quickly out of the footmen's reach, but when they reached a hillock and slackened pace to look round, they saw that the horsemen were not behind and to the right as Gilbert had expected, but ahead and to the left. His ruse had failed. Having confused the white chalks with the filly's coat, the mount-

ed Lambs had kept straight on their southward course, and had passed their zigzagging quarry. Seven in all, the horsemen had halted to listen, and listening, they must now be hearing the shouts of the footmen. There was only one hope for Gilbert and Mina now. They turned due west, retiring under the hillock and then following the trend of the hollows. Within an hour the filly was spent. Gilbert dismounted, and ran beside her, keeping the moon on the left. Before dawn they were crossing the postroad. Neither spoke. Without words their faces warned each other of the dangers besetting that road, and so they continued westward across the downs until the sun rose out of the mists.

They stopped then, shading their eyes and scanning the horizon. Behind them and to the north and south was the rolling plain, ahead of them a forest.

She looked down at his ragged breeches. The sleeve of his shirt was brown with dried blood, and his forehead was as red as Devon earth. The sword had nicked his arm when his hunter had fallen, and somewhere along the way he had wiped his perspiring face with his sleeve. And yet, for all that, he did not look like a strong warrior who had fought at Sedgemoor. He was tall, yes, but his body was that of a runner, narrow and light, immature, not that of one who might fight his way through the king's toils.

"Gil, can you go on?"

"Yes," he answered, catching a breath before and after each word. "Can you?"

"If you can, Gil." She was uncertain. Saddle-sore and stiff, she knew that her legs would not bear her weight if she once alighted.

Neither of them mentioned Axford. It was far away now, and the ship on the coast would sail without them. When they started off again Gilbert's boots dragged on the ground.

She reined the exhausted filly close. "Hold the saddle, Gil."

He wanted to hide his exhaustion, to scorn assistance, to strengthen her confidence in him, but this was no time to pretend. Any moment might bring a band of soldiers over the nearest hill. Grasping the stirrup leather, he let the filly pull him on toward the forest. Nothing miscarried. A cloud of starlings rose out of the elder bushes. An adder slithered into the fern. That was all. They entered the forest, came to a brook, and lay down together on the mosses without so much as removing the filly's bit. The jaded creature waded to her knees, drank, and then wandered off to champ at lichens and blackthorn shoots.

Chapter 5

WILHELMINA woke first. The sun was high, streaming down through the September foliage. Her head was still pillowed on Gilbert's arm, and for a while she continued to lie there, stealing a moment of comfort. It was good to lie with an ear on his pulse, to hear its steady beat, to feel that he was stronger than he looked. Lying on his back with his arms thrown wide, he seemed incapable of ever wielding even so light a weapon as the sword sticking in the ground near his shoulder. And yet he was strangely reassuring—as if his very will would win them through. She stirred upon an elbow and studied his face. His short whiskers sparkled in the sunlight. She reached to touch them, felt them bending smooth under her downward stroke. He was just a boy, a boy too exhausted to stir. And yet he was a man, a man whose face

had burned to a tarnished bronze during a summer of outlawry.

She would have lain there until he opened his blue eyes, but his mutterings were fraught with urgency and she thought to prepare for the day's journey. It was when she sat up that her skin smarted as if stabbed by a thousand poisonous thorns. She crawled to the brook and bathed, holding her skirts up and letting the water flow around her legs. The stings of saddle burns eased and allowed her to feel the dull aches in her stiffened body. "We must rest today," she thought, fighting to suppress her fears of what might befall them. She ducked her face and hair, rubbed her scalp with small fingers, and then remembered that her curls would go lank and straight. She tossed the long, black strands over her shoulders and shook the water out of her ears. It was then that she heard it. Thin and vibrant, it came down on the breeze in so continuous a chorus that at first she could hope it was merely the wind in the trees. But not for long. The baying was suddenly distinct as the breeze shifted.

"Gill" Forgetting her aches, she splashed to the bank. "Gill" When he sprang erect she pointed back toward Salisbury Plain. "Hear?"

"Hounds—but still distant. The horse?"

White patches of gravel on the slimy green bed of the brook told them that the filly had strayed far downstream.

"No matter," Gilbert observed. "That may trick them. We'll have to wade up the brook. Otherwise our scent. . . ."

They began wading barefooted against the current, taking care to leave the gravel undisturbed. The distant baying could be heard above their splashing. Curving to the left, the bank led them into the north-west, but it was their only hope of eluding the Lambs. Once they halted to listen. The baying had ceased. Gilbert knew what that meant. Dragged from the spot where the fugitives had slept, the hounds were

now following the soldiers—perhaps upstream, perhaps down.

The brook was a silver ribbon. When it dwindled to a runnel its bed became difficult to follow. Bushes overhung the thin trickle and tore at their hair. They made another halt, decided that the stream no longer afforded cover for their tracks, and struck westward. Wilhelmina's clothes dried. Her stiffness changed to weakness, her fear to hunger. In the evening, coming out on the edge of a small fen, they frightened countless bustards into the sky. The birds went circling in a great arc and dropped out of sight over the trees.

Wilhelmina gasped at the roar of their wings. "Gilbert, are we lost?" She had never travelled far from Roebury and knew nothing about the remote parts of the county.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "It's a vast country, England. For all our five million people there are immense tracts like this without a living soul. And a good thing," he added reassuringly. "They'll never find us here."

"But Holland. . . ."

"Never fear. It's a long way to the coast, but a week of this. . . ."

"Gil? Which way is London?"

He pointed the way they had come. "East. Some half a hundred leagues and more."

"And the Channel?"

"South. Not half so far."

"And this way?" Her hands swept over the western horizon. "What is there?"

"Somerset. Or what is left of it. It's where we fought. And Gloucestershire. The towns? Taunton, Bridgwater, Bristol. . . ."

"Bristol? You've been there, Gil?"

"We marched to its very gates. That was before the battle at Sedgemoor. It's a place of ships, Bristol. But it's a long way, Mina."

"Far as the south coast?"

"Farther."

"Then Gil . . . Why not go to Bristol? From there we'll sail for Holland."

He pondered awhile. The idea was sound, sounder than she realized. The Lambs might expect them to turn south toward the Channel, and so the safest route of escape would be the west, the seat of the suppressed rebellion. "Then to Bristol we go." He felt his leather wallet. It was still there, under his jerkin. "I've gold enough for passage. And for a new gown."

"It's all we need," she reminded him. "The Prince of Orange will see to that." She pressed a hand to her bodice and felt the hard seal. "I can go on now."

"Hungry?"

She laughed. The gnawing pains were gone long since. In their place was a great lightness. "Just a little," she said, taking his hand and starting across the fen.

They sank to their knees, but the chalk beneath the floating mosses was firm. The effort tired them both, but once across the fen their progress was almost a joy, for a narrow trail led through the forest and ended abruptly in a woodcutter's clearing. No smoke rose from the chimney of the hut. No dog barked. Gilbert scouted around the edges of the clearing before he called to Mina.

"A cart track leads out," he told her cheerfully, pointing under the purple clouds in the west. He had already lifted the wooden latch and peered inside, but now he waited for her to enter.

She looked at the smooth earth floor, at the iron kettle hanging in the black fireplace, at the clean bench and table. Firewood was piled neatly beside the hearth, and in one corner was a sack with pale sprouts growing out through a hole in the leather. She laughed merrily and turned, albeit her smiling lips trembled with excitement. "Gil."

"Yes."

"Carry me in." He seemed hesitant, though whether from surprise or reluctance she could not tell. "I want you to, Gil."

He carried her in. She was warm and soft in his arms. He felt himself hardening, the muscles of his arms sinking into her softness and his blood heating as if a potent wine were running into his veins. The smooth arms about his neck were as warm as the breath on his cheek. When she slid to the floor his arms still encircled her, and he felt her lips on his pulsing throat.

"Oh Gil, will we ever get there?" She buried her face on the soiled ruffles as though she were afraid to remind him of the hazards.

"Why yes," he assured her as best he could. "A week of this. . . ." Her arms were still about his neck. Though warm a minute ago they were trembling now as with a chill. "Come, we'll build a fire."

She let him go. He knelt and lifted a loose stone out of the hearth where the woodcuter had secreted tinder and steel. Although the fair curls tossed about his face as he worked with the flint, and although his protruding tongue was in danger of being bitten, he was more mature and more self-reliant than the boy he had been in June. It made her dissatisfied with herself, and for a moment she was afraid that he might desert her. He was still handsome, while she with her ragged gown and straight hair. . . .

But Wilhelmina could not see the flushed radiance of her own face. If she had had a mirror her glowing eyes would have reassured her. Normally grey, they were ambered now with a sparkle as lively as the yellow flames that leaped up from the hearth.

Soon he was gone with the kettle. Alone, Wilhelmina examined the hut. A roll of ticking filled with straw stood in one corner, a sack half full of sprouting roots in another. The roots puzzled her. Wrinkled and soft, they were unlike any vegetable grown at Roebury.

"Are they good to eat?" she asked when he returned with the kettle full of water.

"Turnips? Horse fodder, though far from poison. I've eaten them before. Some day I want to plant a field of turnips. Look!" He had pulled off his jerkin, exposing a pouch at his belt, and now his fingers delved into it and withdrew pinching a few brown specks. "Turnip seeds. Found them in a Hampshire field."

As if they were more precious than the coins, he let her view them in his palm and then carefully restored them to the wallet, shaking them down to the bottom and knotting the strings tightly. It was one of those little things that made him seem a boy, but now his enthusiasm was contagious and she felt that some day he really would have a field of turnips.

With his sword he peeled several of the coarse roots and set them to boil. Later, either because of the unusual flavour or because of her hunger, she ate heartily. The flames were low now, and Wilhelmina sprawled on the straw-filled tick, her feet to the warm hearth. Gilbert tucked his leather jerkin about her and lay back on the clay floor. In a moment he was sleeping, breathing regularly, his right arm resting on his chest, his left arm extending towards her. Wilhelmina's fingers stole into his upturned palm before she fell asleep.

The hut was dark when she awakened and found she had moved closer to him. Her back was cold, her hip numb from lying on the hard floor. She rolled away, crawled to the hearth, and blew on the coals. Flames licked up and caught the faggots. The hut brightened, but Gilbert slept in spite of the dancing light and the crackling fuel. Still on his back, he lay as though stabbed by his own sword, his legs apart and the toes of his jackboots pointing at the roof. She dragged the mattress to his side and pulled off his boots. Then, afraid of waking him from needed sleep, she was content to lie down on the mattress. She wondered how he had avoided

capture if he had slept thus soundly in the New Forest. And then she slept too—for a time.

She sat up with a start. For minutes she trembled as if her dream were a reality, as if the embers of the fire were the eyes of the baying hounds, as if Gilbert were indeed unable to rise. She must have shrieked then, for instantly he was standing. And almost as quickly he was guarding the door with his sword.

"It's nothing," she told him, reluctant to acknowledge her dream and yet knowing that she must. "Oh Gilbert, come here. It frightens me."

"You screamed. For a moment I thought. . . ."

"The soldiers? That's what I dreamed." She clung to his hand as he came to bend near. "They came and dragged you away. And I . . . Oh Gil, I want you to wed me first." She pulled him down until his curls tingled against her cheek. "Now—before they come."

"In Holland—as soon as we land. I swear it, Mina. Dearest one, believe me."

"But Holland . . . Gilbert, don't you feel it? Don't you know?"

"Upon my heart, Mina, we'll get there soon or late."

"I dreamed of waiting and waiting—and you never came. And my baby was hungry, crying in my arms. And still you did not come. Oh Gilbert, I want him to be yours—not theirs." She was sobbing now, her breath expended and her body quaking against him, her hands in his hair and her wet face smothering his lips. "Wed me, Gilbert. Do, oh do!"

He did not reply for minutes. Instead he sat down beside her, supported her back with his arm, and stared at the dying coals. Except for his unsteady arm he might have been solid stone until his sword reached out and tumbled a stick of wood onto the coals. She wanted him to laugh, to tell her that her dream was false, that together they would sail for Holland and together return to Roebury when the king was

dead. But he did not laugh at her fears. Instead he let her fall backwards onto the mattress.

So it was true enough. He too was afraid. They might never even reach Bristol. She envisioned their separate lots, seeing herself torn out of his protecting arms, himself struck down and taken away. And then the Lambs . . . God forbid! She would die on their pikes first, since die she must.

A flame licked at the fuel and glinted in Gilbert's hair. His back was toward her, his body propped by an arm near her thigh. She sat up and leaned her head against his shoulder, letting her lips brush the fine whiskers of his cheek. If they reached Holland they could marry there again; if not, he would belong to her tonight. It was meant to be thus, and thus it must be.

"Wed me, Gilbert. Wed me now."

She pulled the arm that propped him. Although he could have kept his balance he surrendered easily, wanting to as she knew he must. Her hand sought his body, felt the hard tension of his muscles; and yet his hands were gentle, almost timid at first. And then all restraint was suddenly gone, his breath swift on her face, his knees bruising her legs. She shrank from him in that instant of fierce pain, her fists knotting in his hair and her teeth biting her own hands, and then they were locked together in that one violent throe of passion, and afterwards breathing in unison, and presently wrapped in each other's arms, sleeping an hour, her face to his pulsing throat.

They woke together, each sensible to the other's need, but first he rekindled the fire, for her naked back was cold to the touch of his hand. At last they slept again.

Morning came. She stirred and cried with the sticking pain that comes of naked bodies parting. And then they laughed, he kissing her lashes, she smoothing his hair. All else was forgotten until the dog barked.

After jumping into his breeches and catching up his sword,

Gilbert leaped to the door. She pulled her gown down over her head and ran to his side in the doorway. A Welsh dog, it's stiff coat bristling along the back, was growling halfway between hut and road.

"A cart," she whispered. "I hear wheels on the road."

"A woodman, I think—and likely no friend of the Lambs. But we'd best hide. Coax that dog in."

But the dog was wary, keeping its distance and growling suspiciously. Intending to hide in the bushes near the cart track, they crossed the clearing. The dog followed, barking at their heels, and so they could not watch from concealment. Instead they proceeded boldly along the road until the woodman, walking in advance of his oxen, stopped abruptly and took a defensive stand with his goad held like a quarterstaff.

"Who be ye?" he demanded above the dog's uproar.

"Poor travellers lost in the forest," Gilbert told him. "Call off your dog."

The woodman wore the wide Cromwellian breeches of an earlier epoch. "Still thyself, Richard," he commanded the dog who instantly lowered his tail and slunk in a circle toward the halted oxen. "For whom be ye?"

Gilbert risked the truth. "For none save my lady."

"So 'twould seem—now Monmouth rots. I take ye for a rebel, and ye've no call to fear me. I be Will Fair, the woodcuter. Where be ye going?"

"Bristol and thence to Holland."

"Then I can't help ye—except with vittles. Do ye know the way to Bristol?"

The hospitable woodcutter fed them in the hut. That afternoon, after loading the cart with faggots, he took them westward along the cart track to a farm on an open plain where his wife welcomed them into a thatched dwelling.

When they left on the fifth day few would have doubted that they were country folk. In a black gown and apron, with her hair covered by a loose kerchief and her throat by a

broad collar, Wilhelmina looked like a farmer's daughter. One thing only marred the deception—the smallness of her hands. As for Gilbert, whose blond curls were lopped at the level of his chin, he might have been any swain off to see the town with his young bride.

They progressed slowly, for safety not time was their need. They had time enough, and gold would find them a bed in any cottage. Yet in Somerset where every man was suspect, where every crossroad was marked with hanging bones, they chose to travel by night, resting by day in copse or cavern. Rain drove them into a hostel for three days on end. There they were tempted to take coach, but a show of wealth would incur the inkeeper's suspicion, and so they kept up their masquerade of poor country folk and departed between showers.

"Rebel country," Gilbert explained when they were out of earshot. "The gentry of these parts flocked to Monmouth, and if there's a squire still alive he's under cover. And so . . Well, to show more than a farmer's means would give us away."

They were approaching another scaffold where three crows perched above the hanging objects. The crows flapped sluggishly away into the air only to circle and caw in the grey sky above the gallows. Wilhelmina shaded her eyes against the grisly sight and clung to Gilbert as they passed beneath. Shuddering she asked:

"Was Jem . . . Were they—like that?"

"No—not quartered." It was all the comfort he could offer, for he well knew that the bones above Roebury green were long since bare. To distract her he added: "Those hills we saw before the rain began—the Mendips. Full of caves. Can you bear this a league or two?"

Her discomfort was severe enough before they reached the foothills, and she was glad when he tossed the bundles to the dry floor of the first cavern. She spread her clothes to dry,

put on her bedgown, and returned to the entrance. He was already roasting the leg of mutton bought at a farmhouse. Now and again smoke drifted into the cavern while they ate hungrily, but Gilbert assured her that from the distant road it would appear to be a low fog if indeed it could be seen through the rain. They slept on a bed of bracken gathered from the hillside. It was in the morning that Gilbert noticed the small bruise above her collarbone.

"Did I do that?" He touched the dark spot before she shook her head and explained:

"My seal—it dug into me. I didn't notice." Lying on her back, she held the gold device up to the light of the cavern's entrance; and suddenly she was anxious, remembering something.

"What, Mina?"

"That innkeeper—he might have spied it. At breakfast—when I drew out my handkerchief . . ." She dropped the seal to the hollow between her breasts where it would hang if she were standing. "I remember tucking it down and how it shone—and then you spoke of taking coach and I forgot."

"Gold on a peasant! He couldn't have spied the carvings, but the seal itself is enough to prove . . . No, it must have escaped his eye, else we'd be taken by now." He plucked it from her bosom and examined the delicate carvings, the laurel leaves encircling the windmill, sheaf, and her mother's maiden initials.

"Gilbert, how many days more?"

"To Bristol? One, I judge—due north over these hills."

"Just one?" Her tone was full of regret as if the hardships of travel were forgotten and only the happy sojourns remembered. "It frightens me, Bristol. So big. Gilbert, I want a few more days."

He hesitated, wanting them too, but wanting also to see her safe beyond the sea. "Bristol is big," he agreed. "Thirty

thousand souls, they say. But therein lies our vantage. Who will notice us in such crowds?"

"But if . . . Must we—so soon? A few more days . . . Oh Gilbert—to lose you now!"

Her plea was too similar to his own longing. "A few days then," he assented.

Time was all they had, a little time, and then—what? He shrugged the future from mind and returned her kisses, laughing with her in sweet forgetfulness of all the world. Together they bathed in the valley brook, together they lay in the sun. They walked together, slept together and dreamed together until their scanty provisions were gone. That last night they did not sleep. The remaining hours were too few. They lay in each other's arms while the firelight grew dim. He would have risen to put wood on the embers, but she held him tight:

"Gilbert?" Her voice was warm, indolent, sleepy.

"Yes?" he whispered, his lips tingling to the touch of her hair.

"Scratch my back again."

Chapter 6

THE ROAD to Bristol was littered with the brown leaves of beech trees. Crisp and dry after two days of fair October weather, they crackled underfoot and swirled into the ruts. At noon the sun was strong on their backs, but toward sunset only their steady trudging kept them warm.

"Just one more league," he encouraged her, although the steeples and roofs of the city seemed as distant as ever. "And then we'll find an inn."

Tired and growing hungry again in spite of two halts along the way, Wilhelmina had almost forgotten her fear of entering Bristol, but now the rumbling of wheels behind them, the sound of plodding hoofs, and suddenly the hoof beats of a horseman spurring to overtake them, filled her with fresh misgivings.

As if expecting knives in their backs they walked stiffly, moving off to the side of the road as the wooden wheels squeaked louder and louder. The growing noise all but drowned the crack of a whip and the sharp cry of a punished man. They turned then, for their very show of indifference might draw notice; and they saw the long line of carts and prisoners. The advance horseman drew abreast, eyed them curiously, and passed on. Gilbert and Wilhelmina stopped. The first cart, drawn by a team of horses, was loaded with sickly men—downcast rebels with old scabs and fresh welts on their naked backs and iron collars around their necks. The next cart was the same, and the next. The fourth was crowded with women, and the fifth with men who lay across each other and groaned with every jolt of the cart. Behind them their followed some threescore captives, each with the inevitable iron collar, and each trying to ease the weight of the long connecting chain by carrying part of it on his shoulder. Most of them were strong youths, but here and there among them a weakly fellow struggled to keep his feet. A team of horses pressed them hard from behind, the driver taking a horrid delight in threatening the hindmost with pounding hoofs.

Gilbert squeezed Wilhelmina's hand, cautioned her against showing pity, and prayed that the horseman, who had stopped a short distance away, would not come trotting back. The last cart was passing. Full of cripples like the others, it was

still more hideous. The sight blinded him with emotion, and he sensed rather than saw the suspicious horseman returning. He shook his head, and stared once again at the two men behind the cart. One was dead. Chained by the neck, he had collapsed from the torment and had been dragged to death. His feet slithered along over the dirt and writhed in the ruts. The other man was stumbling as if he too might fall. Hands bound behind his back, he would scarcely survive the ordeal.

Gilbert forgot the mounted officer as the chained rebel stared back at him out of dull brown eyes. It was none other than the red-bearded yeoman whom he had helped to freedom after the battle of Sedgemoor. Those dull eyes were suddenly alert with recognition, and for a moment it seemed that the yeoman would cry out for help, yet he stumbled onward.

The mounted officer drew rein in front of Wilhelmina. Gilbert thought quickly now. In the instant before he acted all her confided fears stormed back into his mind. He remembered that night in the woodcutter's hut, her dream, and her terror that it might come true.

The chained yeoman, stumbling behind the cart, was some twenty paces away. At another time Gilbert would have revolted from the thought of pretending hatred for the suffering man, but now there was Wilhelmina—sickened Wilhelmina, retching because of the unbearable sight. There was naught to do but prove himself a friend of the despised king. He stooped and picked up a stone. Drawing back his arm, he had a glimpse of the girl's stricken face between her hands and was glad that she could not see his apparently disgusting act. He threw the stone. By design it fell short of the yeoman, bounced past him and struck a wheel of the cart. Without looking at the mounted officer to ascertain the effect of the demonstration, he raised his fist in a threatening gesture:

"By the rood! That rebel! The same who stole our pig!"

With an arm he encircled Wilhelmina's waist. "Take heart, my dear—we are avenged! The traitor goes to his doom!" He hoped Wilhelmina understood. Catching the officer's eyes, he winked as if the girl's reaction was due to a weakness inherent in her sex.

The officer returned the wink as he spoke. "Forsooth—to his doom! To Jamaica—and many a cudgeling in store for him on the plantations."

"Jamaica? So far away? A fitting end for the likes." Gilbert's sneer was in keeping with his deception if not with his feelings. "Then we will be avenged. Would I were a planter there with gold enough to buy him! He'll fetch a pretty price in Jamaica?"

"All of fifteen, pounds."

"Paid to our beloved monarch?" Gilbert tried to soften his voice, but the sneer could not be hidden, and now he remembered that his language was not that of a Somerset rustic. He had little aptitude for mimicry, and so he attempted to dismiss the officer by changing the subject. "My good bride is with child," he said with concern, and then, as if that excuse sufficed, led her to a log across the road. They sat down. The horseman lost interest and spurred on after the carts.

They followed at an increasing distance. Bristol's steeples and roofs loomed more and more distinctly in the twilight. Although the curfew would not ring until dark they quickened their steps, slowing to a carefree pace only when they approached Redcliff Gate. The carts that had passed them on the road were parked outside the wall. Horses and prisoners were gone, but two footmen stood guard at the gate. Gilbert waved disarmingly and then engaged Wilhelmina in conversation.

"Those carts—too narrow for Bristol's streets," he told her loud enough for the sentinels to overhear. He did not explain that his information was gleaned during the rebellion. In-

stead he whispered, "Saunter through the gate—as bold as a Lamb."

The sentinels on either side of the gate were watching them closely. One titled his pike to a menacing angle and appeared ready to challenge them. Gilbert quickly turned aside, accosting the watchman and waving the girl on her way. "I say, sergeant," he asked blatantly before the private-man could recover from the unexpected move. "Those rebels for Jamaica? Which ship's a-loading them? I bear them grudges a-plenty and crave to see them off. Which ship, I say?"

"Marry, man! They's a hundred ships tied up to Frome Quay—mostly for the 'Mericas. Go look fer yersel'—unless ye fear the press gangs."

"Press gangs?"

"Ye be no man o' years. So take advice, lad. Keep off the quays or take yer chances. Ships they be a-plenty, but hands be scarce. They'll crimp ye quick. Now out o' the gateway, lad. Yer sister's awaitin' there, an' tain't no likely place fer a maid o' virtue—'lieve me."

Gilbert thanked him roundly and hurried after Wilhelmina. Her cheeks were pale, and the hand that burrowed into his own was trembling.

"I thought . . . Oh Gil, you were so long!"

"But it worked! Mina, we're in!" He could hardly believe it. Although he had kept his doubts to himself he had never been sure of the gatekeepers, and now that they were indeed in Bristol his great relief amounted to exultation. His emotion was contagious, for even Wilhelmina suddenly spoke of food and bed.

"But not too far from the river," she added. "Some inn where we can see the ships."

They were walking up Redcliff Street, gradually converging on the Avon. Ships were anchored right up to the bridge, but none flew the red flag of Holland. Gilbert saw Wilhel-

mina's disappointment and was quick to explain that Bristol proper, which they were approaching, was enclosed by two rivers, the Avon and the winding Frome.

"The quays are on the Frome," he assured her. "Across the city." As they entered the bridge over the Avon and strolled between the houses lining its sides, he pointed at a space between the spires of St. Nicholas. "Over that hill, Mina."

St. Nicholas Church was built on the gate at the end of the bridge. They approached with misgivings but found no guards under the low vault, and so they kept on, climbing the hill to High Cross and then down Broad Street. Dogs pulled small carts up and down the hill. Horses in tandem dragged sledges over the cobbles.

Wilhelmina kept close to Gilbert, for the street was crowded with people hurrying home before the curfew. The buildings hid the Frome River, but when a lane opened to the left she glimpsed the shipping down at the quays. Near the waterfront they halted under the sign of the *Angel's Wings.* It was a likely inn, a large one-and-a-half storey structure of half-timbers and plaster. Gable windows overlooked the warehouses on the quays.

Both were leaning out the casement of their room and scanning the shipping on the Frome when the curfew sounded above the last rumbles of sledges and dogcarts. Other noises persisted—the grunts of hogs in the street, the uproar of brawling seamen somewhere among the warehouses, the barking of dogs, and beneath the floor of the room the drone of conversation and laughter. They went down for supper.

The dining-room was one great expanse of sandy floor, heavy tables, and oak pillars holding up the ceiling. A great fireplace hung with black pots occupied the far end. Gilbert led her to the least crowded table, the nearest the fire. Although the heat and steam brought perspiration to their foreheads they were glad of the comparative privacy, for the

guests were a boisterous lot. Mostly seamen, they had long since finished dining and many were now far in their cups. More than a few took note of the pretty girl's black curls and sunburned forearms, and some openly made lewd remarks which would have invoked Gilbert's challenge if he had forgotten his masquerade. He smarted with helplessness as if straining to free himself from chains, and forced himself to warn Wilhelmina that her haughty stares befitted a gentleman's lady rather than a rustic's bride.

The innkeeper served them venison pasty and recited a list of beverages, patiently repeating them one by one when they hesitated: "Coffee? Tea? Ale? Gooseberry wine? Bristol milk?"

They ordered Bristol milk and were served a wine which Gilbert took to be Oporto sweetened with sugar. Through the fog from the steaming pots and the smoke from tobacco pipes, he saw a neat little man who might look all of seventy years if that tawny wig were set on the table beside his velvet hat. In spite of the little man's unconcealed interest in him, Gilbert was sure they had never met, for if he had ever seen that waxen face before he would have remembered it. Although a moment ago he had been sitting with his back toward Gilbert, he had swung his chair sidewise so that he could observe them as easily as the seamen at his own table. His conspicuous clothes, an unbuttoned coat of wine-colored velvet over a creamy waistcoat of flowered muslin that hid all but the black knees of his breeches, were quite out of place in this haunt of seamen clad in tarry slops.

"Gil. He's coming over."

"An odd sort—but likely harmless. A merchant, I suppose, but why he wants to speak to us is beyond me."

Closer at hand now, they saw that his clothes were indeed costly, but about his velvet coat there was nothing to suggest a spendthrift. Indeed the sponged look of his flowered waistcoat spoke of miserliness, as if in clothes of lasting qual-

ity the shrewd merchant expected to save money. Gilbert felt that he would mend them at the first sign of a hole. But it was his eyes, little sparks sunk in wrinkled recesses, that held Gilbert's attention. They were shrewd eyes, and yet their total lack of hostility gave the impression that here was a man who recognized but respected the disguise of an uneasy nobleman.

"Gilbert—he knows."

"Yes, but friendly. Bristol's full of would-be-rebels—and it was close by here they burned a ship to signal. . . ." He cut his sentence short, for the man was within earshot. Walking with short, mincing steps as if afraid of filling his shoes with the sand of the floor, the little man greeted them for all the world like one who had left their table for only a moment, neither giving his name, nor apologizing, nor waiting for an invitation to sit down. His manner was that of a guest resuming a conversation:

"The *Charity* sails on the morning tide."

The direct statement with all its implications shocked Gilbert. In the brief pause before that sibilant voice continued he feared that all Bristol knew of their hope to find a ship bound for Holland. He looked into the little man's expressionless eyes and saw nothing to increase or relieve his anxiety. Nothing about that waxen face could reveal the stranger's thoughts, nothing but his tongue, and now Gilbert was chilled by the man's perception:

"Ye wish to reach the Continent. The fare is seven pounds —each." No quibbling, no questioning, no persisting. Just simple statements.

Gilbert trembled with the wonder of it all. It was impossible to believe, and yet the little man was staring back at him, waiting for his answer.

"Oh Gil—he knows!" She was squeezing his arm and pressing close as if afraid that he might refuse the offer. "Say yes

—anywhere on the Continent! We can take coach for Amsterdam."

"The *Charity* sails for Amsterdam," said the merchant, his voice a discordant whisper with a quavering hint of senility. It was lifeless, monotonous. It was as though there was no need for inflection, as though the literal meanings of his words were important enough to hold the attention of any listener.

"But how?" Gilbert asked in astonishment. "How did you know?"

Apparently the merchant considered the question idle talk unworthy of his time. He ignored it without so much as glancing again at the handkerchief in Wilhelmina's sleeve, at the modish way she had curled her hair before coming down to dine, or at the small hand that a minute ago had been holding a knife too daintily for any milkmaid. He merely waited for their decision.

"Of course we accept." Gilbert's voice was not enthusiastic. He could not help but suspect that it was all too easy. And yet he was helpless, for to decline the offer might be to offend the merchant who could easily denounce them as fugitives. No fate could be worse than falling into the clutches of the Lambs. "Sir, may I inquire your name?"

"Ebenezer Cheevy." He did not explain that he owned the *Charity*, but somehow that idea stuck in Gilbert's mind as if the fact were actually stated.

"In the morning, then," Gilbert agreed. "How shall we know the *Charity?*"

"Ye will go aboard tonight." Again there was no explanation. Everything Ebenezer Cheevy said was definite, indisputable, final. He stood up. "Be ready in the hour."

There was no hint of how they might escape the hazards of Bristol's waterfront, but Gilbert sensed that they were to await the old man's instructions. Gilbert also felt that further questions would go unheeded, for the merchant seemed

to have forgotten them already, as if this piece of business were at an end. A moment later, after walking with the same bird-like steps, he was seated at his own table. He spoke briefly to the seaman on his right. The seaman set down his half-emptied glass, pulled his stocking cap over his bald head, and rose to do the merchant's bidding. Gilbert's eyes followed him among the crowded tables to the taproom at the rear.

"Oh Gil—can it really be true!" It was an expression of wonder rather than a question. Her bosom was heaving as if she had taken her first breath since Ebenezer Cheevy had addressed them. She was too excited to touch the remnant of her venison pasty. Instead she squirmed so restlessly in her chair that the merchant, if he had noticed her then, would have doubted his first judgment and thought her a milkmaid indeed.

"Think of it!" she exulted. "Holland—at last!"

Her rapture could scarcely be restrained. It was infectious, and Gilbert's misgivings slipped away until he too was sitting on the edge of his chair. He laughed aloud when Wilhelmina complained that the steam was ruining her curls.

"Don't fret, Mina. In Amsterdam we'll trick you out in silks and laces." The problem of financing their life in Holland beset him. He had some thirty odd pounds in his wallet, enough to see them lodged in some hostel, but from that point on he could not determine their course.

"The Prince," she said, guessing his thought and thus reminding him that William of Orange would find him some commission in his army—perhaps in an army that might one day invade England and eject their enemies. "Oh! My seal!" She cried anxiously as if the seal were lost. Her hand went to her breast, and then she smiled up at him—almost shyly.

"One thing I'm sure of," he remarked lightly. "You'll never lose that seal—not in a hundred years."

She nodded, glancing at the merchant who was using his

table for a desk. For some time he had been jotting notes, but now he pushed the inkstand aside and rolled up the parchment. Instead of putting it into one of his gold-braided pockets he kept it in his hand as if it were a club. Indeed he now motioned with it, and instantly the three seamen left his table and hurried through the taproom doorway.

Wilhelmina swallowed a lump in her throat. The time had come at last. She squeezed Gilbert's hand under the table as Ebenezer Cheevy stood up and meticulously brushed unseen crumbs from the lap of his waistcoat.

When he beckoned, Wilhelmina and Gilbert followed the little man through the taproom to a door that opened on a yard. For an instant the light of the taproom illuminated the faces of some eight or ten waiting seamen.

Armed with cudgels, they looked more like thugs than escorts. In sloppy breeches and smocks, half of them stared back at their charges in the doorway. Others faced the outer darkness, their feet apart and their weapons gripped as if in readiness to repulse an assault. Frightened by their rough appearance, Wilhelmina drew back in the doorway. But immediately, hearing sounds of pitched combat in a distant alley, she realized that only under such a heavy guard could she and Gilbert board the ship. Even so, she hung back on Gilbert's arm until Ebenezer Cheevy, without a word to the seamen, stepped between their ranks.

"Come, Mina," she heard Gilbert urging. "If it's safe for him. . . ."

"Still yer tongue!" The warning came from a hulking brute beside her.

Wilhelmina shrank against Gilbert whose arm about her back propelled her along behind the quick-stepping merchant. On either side she heard the heavy clump-clump of seamen's boots. The medley of shouts and curses was nearer now. The foremost seamen halted. Barely visible in the darkness, they spread their arms, cautioning the others against

proceeding. All listened intently to many feet pounding the cobbles. The sounds grew louder until presently, some thirty paces down the thoroughfare, they changed to scuffling, grunting, and thudding. All at once they subsided to winded voices and one long moan that ended abruptly.

In front of her Wilhelmina made out the dim figures of Ebenezer Cheevy and the seamen. The hunched seaman who seemed in command of the others now turned right and led the party into so narrow an alley that Wilhelmina could no longer cling to Gilbert's arm. Beyond the alley was an open space and beyond that a forest of masts and yards. They hurried across the quay, and presently clambered down into a waiting boat. Progress over the water was slow as the oarsmen continually had to use their oars to fend themselves off from the black hulls about them. Sagging hawsers and taut stays crisscrossed overhead, cutting the dim sky like the nets of gigantic spiders. The water was slack, noiseless except for the drip of wet oars, but as the boat slid past the rudder of a barkentine Wilhelmina heard a long moan like that of many cattle lowing in the distance. Instinctively she pressed closer to Gilbert. His encircling arm tightened.

"What is it?" she whispered. The very tension of his arm was both ominous and comforting.

"Only a rope creaking."

She knew that he lied, for already the smell of tarred rigging was tainted with a stench like that of an open sewer. Of a sudden her mind was back on the road leading to Bristol, her eyes once more seeing the shackled prisoners, and her ears hearing the rumble of the carts.

"Gilbert! That sound!" The pressure of his arm made her gasp, and for a long moment while the oarsmen pulled in silence she could not catch her breath. Perhaps it was well that it was so, for like a draught from hell itself the air became a choking fog of evil breath, pouring over the bulwark and spreading out on the river. Now that they were moving

past the ship's waist she could hear louder sounds above that dull moan—the creak of a winch, the clapping of a hatch, and then the rough bark of a boatswain on the ship's deck:

"Heave 'em overboard!"

Wilhelmina closed her eyes. She heard oaths above her and to the left. The boat lurched regularly as if the oarsmen were pulling violently in the hope of avoiding danger. There was a great splash between ship and boat. Water doused her face and arms. Another splash. Another cascade of water. Rough laughter came from above, and other voices farther forward on the deck of the ship chanted in unison:

"One an' hold! Two an' hold! Three an' away!"

She screamed, knowing what it was, knowing why Gilbert flung her backwards into the bottom, knowing why he covered her with his body. The boat shuddered under the impact of the dead weight. An oar splintered and catapulted high into the night to drop flat on the river. She had opened her eyes, and now Gilbert was helping her back onto the seat while the oarsmen pulled madly. There was more chanting on the ship, but the last body splashed astern.

Out of danger now, the crew rowed at a slacker speed. The coxswain in the stern ordered the body of the rebel to be tumbled overside. Quickly a man bent to obey—and as quickly exclaimed:

"Livin'! A livin' corpse!"

"Ha! Took 'im fer dead, eh? A sly one, that lubber!"

The man was stirring in the bottom of the boat. He sat up, a vague outline of nakedness and baldness. He said nothing, but Wilhelmina had a feeling that she had seen the outline of those bare shoulders before. The suspicion was short-lived, for the nearness of another ship took her attention. It was a two-master with bundles of canvas snugged close up to her yards. The boat, lunging with every stroke of the oarsmen, was pointing directly at the looming hull, and Wilhelmina knew it was the *Charity*. The crew shipped oars. The lurch-

ing ceased. Smoothly the boat glided in under the bulwarks as if resting after a tremendous effort, and, like Wilhelmina's tense body, relaxed. The long flight was over, and Gilbert was here beside her. All the anxieties were at an end. She could remember the past now, remember it in all its stark reality—the long summer of waiting at Roebury, the homecoming of father and brothers, their arrest. It was wiser to forget, but there was no forgetting. She remembered it all—her pleading with Captain Vetch, and that ugly bargaining. And then the shock of the truth. Of a sudden she was crying, her face in her hands, and her long hair falling upon her knees. They were all dead, all except Gilbert.

The boat scraped against the ship. Shuddering with uncontrollable gasps, she was hardly aware of the sounds about her—the rattle of oars, the clatter of boots on the footboards, the sharp commands of the boatswain. She was conscious only of Gilbert's hushed voice. He was trying to comfort her, to tell her that all was well, that this ship was the *Charity*.

Chapter 7

CHARITY. NEVER was a ship so wretchedly misnamed. Six weeks out of Bristol the *Charity* dug into a November gale that snarled down from the north by day and night. Toward the end of the seventh week the screaming ceased. Spume still drenched the rigging, but the seas no longer washed the decks. The moon was slicing the thin edge of a silver overcast when Wilhelmina, one hand holding a pannikin and the

other gripping the throat of her canvas smock, stole along the deck in the shadows of the moonlit sails. The wind tore at her hair, combed it to leeward as if with clawing fingers. On the foredeck she found Gilbert pulling on a rope that passed through a creaking block and seemed to control a triangular sail billowing out over the bow. Wilhelmina hesitated, for there was another man with him. His back was toward her, and for a while she was uncertain of his identity. But now, after hitching the rope's end to a bitt, the bigger man turned his face as though to look up at the foremast. He was Tom Bullen, the same who had survived the march to Bristol, the same who had fallen into the *Charity's* boat in the Bristol anchorage.

Wilhelmina called softly. Her voice whisked away in the wind. She called again. Tom looked toward the shadow, touched Gilbert's arm, and together they strode toward her, walking with the easy erectness of men accustomed to the roll of the decks.

"Mina!" Gilbert's throat was husky, but his cough seemed no worse than it was last night. It made his greeting seem a reprimand, but in spite of his objections she knew that he was glad to see her. "Mina! Must you!"

"Please, Gilbert. I know it's a risk, but . . . Here! Rum!"

He reached for the rum, fumbled for an instant, and then pried his stiff fingers wide enough to grip the pannikin instead of a rope. "Now hurry below, or you'll take ill again."

"Drink."

He took a drink and passed the pannikin to Tom Bullen. "Mina, you're thin. Your hands—like chicken bones! Can't you eat at all?"

"Some—now. He makes me eat."

"Cheevy? Makes you?"

"Oh Gil!" She clung to his coarse sleeve. It was damp and yet as stiff as frozen canvas. It's as if he wants to fatten me—like a pig for market. It frightens me. Are we really going to

New England? Not to Jamaica where—where those. . . ."

"New England—so the crew say. New England first, and then Jamaica. You shiver, Mina. It's best you take shelter below." He coughed over her shoulder. To push her out of his wet arms was somehow too cruel.

She spoke impulsively as if a vague suspicion had suddenly become a dreadful certainty. "He will sell us in Jamaica."

Gilbert scanned the foredeck. Except for Tom Bullen, keeping watch near the weather rail and whistling, nobody was in sight. As always when they met thus in the darkness, Tom would cease whistling at the approach of a deck-hand. As crafty as old Ebenezer Cheevy himself, Tom might yet think of some way to cheat that treacherous miser. Often during the night watches they had discussed the chances of escape, but beyond the notion of jumping ship in Boston, they had hit upon no practical scheme. New England, according to scraps of information gleaned from the crew, was little more than the name of wilderness. A sprinkling of hamlets clung to the tide waters—and all the rest was desolation. "No," Gilbert swore savagely. "We'll run away in Boston. After Cheevy sails we'll board a ship for Holland." He was unsure, for the governor of New England would be a minion of the English tyrant James, and might send them home.

She was shivering. Her hair was drenched with spume. Gilbert kissed her and held her at arm's length.

"Yes," she assented to his mute order. "It's wise I hurry back. If he wakes. . . ."

She did not like to think of Ebenezer Cheevy waking up in his hammock and finding hers empty. The wizened creature would punish Gilbert again, might even order that cruel mate to have him flogged to death. No, not to death. Ebenezer Cheevy was too selfish to kill men. They were worth more alive.

She turned quickly and went aft by the lee rail. The com-

panionway was dark and she felt her way down to the cabin. Except for the creaks of the ship all was silent, but she knew he was peering down from his hammock and listening to her movements. He had been wheezing in his sleep a few minutes ago. He would say nothing now, but in the morning, if he suspected where she had been, he would call the mate and without a word of explanation, direct him to have Gilbert tied to the shrouds.

"I was ill again," she said quickly. "I had to go up."

In a moment he was wheezing again. Wilhelmina could not fall asleep. There was no means of knowing if he doubted her explanation. Her hammock, ever rocking with the heaving of the sea, swayed farther and farther into the corner. She watched the sklight tilting more and more until it seemed that the ship must capsize. The starboard watch, she decided, had hauled the square sails around a new tack. A moment later the faint clanging of a bell told her that the watch was changing and that Gilbert was returning to the forepeak. He would have four hours to rest. The thought relieved her to a degree which permitted weariness to overcome anxiety, and she too fell asleep.

It was the mate who startled her out of a dream in which she had been bathing her daughter—a bouncing little Axford with curly blonde hair like her father's. She had always known it would be curly, not straight like her own. For an instant after the cabin door opened she was so confused that the shocking reality impinged on her senses less starkly than during other awakenings. Ebenezer Cheevy, when she looked down from her hammock, was already dressed. A chart of America, its springy corners weighed down with the ledgers and the inkstand, was spread out on the table in front of him. But instead of charting the ship's course he was regarding the intruder.

"Land, Mister Cheevy. A point or two over the port bow."

The old captain showed neither surprise nor satisfaction.

Another captain might have named the landfall, but not Ebenezer Cheevy. "Keep her there," was all he said.

Wilhelmina was on deck when Gilbert came up at eight bells. Forbidden to converse with him, she nodded at the hazy land mass over the bows. He angled toward her, letting the seamen lumber past. How changed he was! His hair was as stiff as the frayed end of a tarred hawser and as black as his cracked hands. Cropped unevenly instead of tied like a seaman's pigtail, it defied the wind that tugged at her own hair. His voice, when he passed close without stopping, was husky but fraught with urgency in spite of his cold.

"Get near Tom Bullen," he whispered. "Heed him—a plan for. . . ."

She missed the last word as the boatswain shouted angrily: "Lively there! Aloft—or ye'll make port this side o' Boston."

Her eyes followed Gilbert up the ratlines to the masthead and out on a swaying yardarm. No longer the awkward man of seven weeks ago, he responded aptly to the barked orders and hauled his corner of the sail up to the yard. Gathering in the canvas, he glanced at the shoreline. She thought a smile exposed his teeth, but it might have been a wince of pain as the cracks in his hands broke open afresh. Tom Bullen, bald atop his head but read-bearded from his ears down to his neck, was reefing the opposite corner of the sail. He, too, was stealing furtive looks at the land. It might be some time before she found an opportunity to approach him, and so she divided her attention between the bustling crew and the shores of the bay.

Later the *Charity* was driving into a channel among headlands and islands, some wooden, some barren, all surrounded by mudflats reaching out with the tide. Wondering where the town might lie, she searched the changing scene over the bows, and at last, after the ship ran past a fortified island on the left, she saw it—a haphazard patchwork of buildings and roads that looked as if they had been tossed down from the

row of bleak hills in the background. Several ships floated in the anchorage and as many more lay alongside the wharves.

She caught Tom Bullen's attention as he jumped from the lower ratlines to the deck. On his way to execute an order he swerved close by her and halted, shading his eyes as if studying a fouled sail. Without moving his lips he murmured breathy phrases:

"Bide time till the deck's clear o' eavesdroppers. Then come casual like, an' listen, showin' no sign."

She almost nodded before the boatswain bawled a threat that sent Tom Bullen running to the foredeck. Feigning interest in the crew's activities, she stood at the rail until they dropped anchor. All sails were neatly furled by the time Ebenezer Cheevy, once again dressed in his wine coat and tawny wig, came up the companionway and blinked at the sun.

"Lower the boat," Cheevy ordered in that same dead voice that so well reflected his spirit. While the crew labored with the boat he inspected the rigging, stepped down to the waist and walked ahead of the mate and boatswain as far as the foredeck. Wilhelmina was in his path as he returned by way of the port side.

"Get in the boat," he ordered, hardly glancing at her to see if she went. Accustomed to being obeyed, he kept on toward the afterdeck, but the mate stepped in front of her. The ugly face with its boneless nose was close, but in this moment of panic she had eyes only for Gilbert and Tom who had heard the captain's order and were consulting in whispers.

For her there was no choice. To object would only incur rough compulsion. Moreover, although Tom had not yet imparted his plan of escape, her safe passage to shore must have been the chief problem. He and Gilbert, she decided, would more easily reach land if she were already across the intervening water. But the thought of being separated from

Gilbert for even the remainder of the day struck terror into her being. A hundred stark mishaps raced through her mind. He might not find her in the town. He might not even succeed in reaching shore. What then? What if he sailed with the ship? How, if somehow they managed to survive, would they ever find each other? In less time than it took the mate's cruel face to snarl a warning she conceived a thousand dangers, each a death in itself, and each as terrifying as this instant of panic. She did not hear the threat, nor did she reason that the mate's reluctance to seize her arm was due to a fear of Ebenezer Cheevy who wanted her comeliness preserved. She saw only that Gilbert and Tom were crossing the deck, and she reasoned only that they would attempt to take positions in the boat.

And so she obeyed, wheeling away from the glowering mate, and hurrying to the opposite rail. A rope net had been thrown overside, but the lowered boat was not yet manned. After a glance at Gilbert and Tom who were following her, she clambered over the bulwark. But her shoe had scarcely found a foothold in the net when, facing the rail as she prepared to descend, she saw the mate lunging toward Gilbert. From behind him long arms reached up and clapped down on Gilbert's shoulders, spinning him around and crashing him to the deck. Turning, Tom at first seemed about to strike back, but almost at once the mate felled him also. She thought his collapse to be a deliberate act, and now, while the seamen clustered around and burst out with mocking taunts, it seemed to her that Tom was whispering to Gilbert as they rose together. The mate was waiting for them, obviously expecting and inviting their combined attack. The remainder of the crew was making such an uproar that Ebenezer Cheevy and the boatswain, if indeed they spoke from the afterdeck, could not be heard. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the wine coat flapping near the stairway leading

down to the waist, but at that instant Gilbert backed close to the bulwark in front of her:

"The boat!" he urged loudly enough to make himself clear. "Get it and cast loose."

It was an impossible scheme. She understood that she was to descend to the boat and throw off the mooring ropes and that Gilbert and Tom, after feigning submission, were to follow. It was impractical, desperate, and yet it was their only hope of escape. She looked down at the boat, saw the hooks of the tackle passing through ring bolts at stern and bow. It would be easy to uncouple the hooks, and so she began the descent. But her eyes were still above the rail when several deck-hands closed in behind Tom and Gilbert; and it was then that Ebenezer Cheevy squirmed into view. Commanding silence by his very presence, he did not so much as raise a hand. For a moment, while the men shifted from foot to foot, he stood there, resembling a small venomous reptile in a cage full of cringing hares, and then he rasped an order:

"Lock them in irons." That was all. He did not add, "Mutineers!" but his thought was clear to Wilhelmina.

She might have fallen then, might have crashed into the boat, but instinct fastened her hands to the rail while the men seized Tom and Gilbert. The struggle was brief. Tom sank under the weight of overpowering numbers, and Gilbert went down under the blow of a marline-spike. She could neither scream nor plead as Gilbert struggled to rise. But she heard him. Above the scuffs and growls of the crew she heard him distinctly:

"Mina! Mina! Be sure . . ."

A hand over his mouth cut off his cry, but she knew what it would have been: "Be sure I will come."

Ebenezer Cheevy went overside, and then rough hands forced her down into the boat. If her sobs touched the seamen pulling at the oars she was as oblivious of their sympathy as of the town and the wharves they were approaching.

Through wet eyes she saw only the *Charity*, already swinging with the rising tide and pointing out to sea. Soon, in a day or a week, that ship would sail away. And Gilbert, struggling hopelessly in irons now, would be still aboard.

"Aloft, wench!" The boatswain prodded her after Cheevy and several men went ashore.

She turned and saw a wharf built on tall barnacled piles, a ladder leading up. Rough hands spanned her waist as if to assist her in climbing.

"Wheezin' Judas! Ain't ye a soft one! Right smart Old Cheevy be in gettin' rid o' ye afore ye've the whole crew droolin'. Now up ye go!"

He heaved her up to catch a high rung of the ladder. She climbed to a wharf thronged with townsfolk down to view the ship. Winches and sheer booms screeched on either hand. Ebenezer Cheevy, already surrounded by a group of merchants, was reading from a manifest, his rasping voice coming to her like the seething of backwaters amid the roar of breakers:

"Bristol baize. Glass. . . ." He saw Wilhelmina and beckoned, continuing to address the merchants. "I bring wares exceeding fine—but first ye eye a maid fit to serve a prince."

As a group the merchants showed little interest in the girl. Only one, a paradox of great age and physical strength, gave her more than a casual glance. He wore shoes of pliable leather ornamented with coloured beads, and yet despite the lack of heels he towered above the others. Straight backed and obviously bony under a red coat stained at the armpits, he looked more like a soldier than a merchant, for outside his coat he had girded a leather belt as heavy as the breeching of a draught horse. Indeed, while the others either lacked swords or swung them under coattails, he wore his brass-hilted weapon in full view as if he often found need of it. Out of stony eyes as grey as the thin veil of hair falling to his

shoulders, he regarded her as objectively as a farrier appraising a jaded mare.

Wilhelmina disliked him at once. The prospect of belonging to such a taskmaster filled her with dread, and with her eyes she implored the other merchants to consider her worth. She wanted to cry out, to assure them that her small hands could work, but none except the rugged old man was watching her, and so she tried to feign ineptitude, letting her hands tremble and her shoulders droop—as well they might under the weight of hopeless resignation.

"The price?" His was the deepest voice she had ever heard, a sound that came out of his broad chest like thunder out of January clouds, cold and brittle, yet ominous and frightful. By contrast Ebenezer Cheevy's reply was like the quick swishes of a whip:

"Eats no more than a kitten—and docile as a lamb. A bargain, Major Waldron, if ye've ever seen one. Ten sovereign takes her—though in Jamaica she'd fetch twenty from any planter. Yours, Major Waldron—if ye've an eye for values. Ten sovereign—the price of her fare."

And so it was arranged. Wilhelmina was bonded for seven years. She was a virtual slave, subject to the will of a master who, once his sloop cleared the wharf on the following morning, was answerable to none but his Maker. But Wilhelmina was not thinking about Major Waldorn as the sloop gained steerageway. As unaware of his rumbling orders as of the popping of the hoisted sails, she was conscious only of the *Charity* which the sloop must pass in a moment. Jib and spanker set, the ship was weighing anchor and moving toward the wharf. Captain Cheevy, clearly visible in his wine coat, was standing beside the mate at the helm. Half the crew was at the forward capstan, half in the rigging, but nowhere on the deck was there a figure resembling either Gilbert or Tom. Shackled in the hold, they would not be able to hear her call, and yet she called.

"Gil-l!" It was a desperate wail. "Gil-l!"

For answer there was a curious silence as the men in the *Charity's* shrouds looked down on the passing sloop, and then there was an outburst of derisive laughter.

"Bother yer pretty head no more," one of the riggers shouted back. "We'll take good care o' yer lubber! Ha! Eh, mateys?"

She called again, but like the cry of a gull in the wind her despairing voice was lost in the mocking clamor from the larger ship. The four-man crew of the sloop shook their heads. Harrowing thoughts possessed her as the sterns of brig and sloop drew apart, as Wilhelmina made her way aft, stumbling over cordage and cargo. The sloop's movement was still sluggish, but when Wilhelmina reached the stern, the distance to the *Charity* was a good stone's throw. In that moment of panic she considered jumping into the eddying wake, swimming to the *Charity*, and thus uniting her lot with Gilbert's. But she could not swim. Neither could she hope that Major Waldron would let himself be cheated by Ebenezer Cheevy. It was hopeless, and yet desperation urged her to jump. Her eyes, casting about the sloop's deck for some buoyant object that might sustain her in the water, must have revealed her intention, for Major Waldron let the tiller idle and lunged to catch her wrist.

"None o' that, me girl! Thou'lt be a worse sight off with Cheevy than with me. 'Tis Jamaica he sails for—Jamaica."

"Oh please!" She clung to his arm, imploring. "Buy him too! Oh buy my husband too!"

"Buy him! An' have him light out first chance? A woman is another matter." He jerked her nearer the tiller which he kicked several notches farther to port. "'Tis Jamaica for him—Jamaica Island where he can't break bond. So put it out o' thy mind, girl. There ain't a fool in Boston would buy a man. Negroes, yes—an' women. But a white man or an Injun? Nary the chance. They up an' off to the bush!"

Unlike Ebenezer Cheevy he was given to explanation, but his words were of little comfort. She had a vision of Gilbert fleeing from some planter in Jamaica only to reach the shores of an impassable sea.

"Down, girl! Under the boom!" Major Waldron flung her to the deck and stooped low until the fore-and-aft mainsail swung across the deck. "Get forward," he muttered. "An' find thyself a blanket. Thou hast a fit o' the shivers, an' thou'd better tend to thy health. Cocheco's no town o' brick an' stone—I can tell thee that."

She was indeed trembling. The deck was cold to her hands as she pushed herself up. She wiped her eyes with her black hair and picked her way down to the low cabin—a squeaking cubicle smelling of tobacco, fish and rum. She closed the door, wiped her eyes again and again until her vision cleared, and bundled herself in blankets. "Yes," she murmured aloud, trying to subdue the fearful thoughts that only sharpened her despair. "I must tend my health. If Gilbert ever does come to us . . . Oh God, I must keep living. I must! If he comes too late to find us alive. . . ." With that thought she felt her waist. There was no appreciable swelling, but she was sure now. She had been sure ever since that first night aboard the *Charity*.

Chapter 8

THAT MORNING aboard the sloop was one of abject despair. All the noises of the sloop—the slapping of waves against the hull, the trampling of feet on the deck, the creaking of the

timbers, and the whine of wind in the rigging—went unheard. Huddled in the blankets, she was prey to thoughts of a future as gloomy as the ill-lit cabin itself. And so, perhaps, it was well that the crew, singly taking turns below for cold meals of salt pork, biscuit, and water, distracted her with their comings and goings during the remainder of the voyage—a racking fight against a sleet-laden northerly wind that lasted until the sloop drove up the Pisquataqua to a long neck of land dividing the main river from its tributary, the Cocheco.

To Wilhelmina, coming on deck as the sloop drifted in toward the wharf extending out from the bank, Cocheco presented a more desolate appearance than even the sombre forests that pressed hard against its black fields. The five log houses, each with its cluster of outbuildings, were surrounded by palisades that spoke of enemies lurking in the forest. And now the five separate gates burst open, disgorging some forty-odd figures who came running down to the wharf. Men cheered, women called to husbands aboard the sloop, children babbled excitedly:

"Papa, Papa! Uncle Pete, ye fetched me a musket? Saints above, there's a woman aboard!" The shouts were scarcely distinguishable one from the other as the entire populace swarmed over the wharf, but when the foremost settler jumped down to the sloop, Wilhelmina heard his blunt words all too distinctly:

"Major! Ye done it! Ye brung me a wife!"

For an instant she could only recoil from the settler's eyes, eyes so avid that all else about him escaped her. Neither his brown teeth, exposed by a drooping lip, nor his matted beard made any impression on her until Major Waldron answered:

"We'll see, Dod Theaker. We'll see." He beckoned to a knot of soldiers, and without waiting for their approach, climbed to the wharf and strode to meet them.

The settler, a scrawny fellow in soiled deerskin with a

powder horn slung from his belt, continued to stare at her out of unwavering eyes.

"Why ye backin' off?" he demanded hoarsely as if he could not understand, as if, Willhelmina thought, he had never seen himself in a mirror. "A-puttin' on, eh? Well, ye needn' act shy-like—not with me, I'd take ye as ye is—dainty an' thin withal." Ignoring the garrulous throng on the wharf above them, he spoke almost quietly, but such was the sharp quality of his rasping voice that she missed few of his words as he jerked a forefinger at Major Waldron: "He ain't a-wantin' ye fer a wife—not him as has one o' his own. Now ye'll jus' act delicate-like, a-spoilin' the cookin' an' that, and he'll give ye over in no time at all."

Still backing away, Wilhelmina was struck with his utter conceit. It sickened her to think that she was now so insignificant that such a wretch as Dod Theaker considered himself a suitor. She looked down at her skirt. Woven in Somersetshire, smeared with the tar of the ships, last washed in cold brine, it was stiff and coarse—a sordid garment as inferior to those left in her garde-robe at Roebury as this loathsome settler was to Gilbert. Expecting to feel matted hair, she instinctively lifted her hand to her head. The curls were gone, but the strands that tossed in the winter breeze were as soft as ever. Her face? She could not tell, and Dod Theaker's "Ye be right pretty" only caused her to shiver and glance helplessly at the wharf.

But Major Waldron, conversing with a soldier, seemed to have forgotten her existence. Before the sloop docked she had dreaded the prospect of working for so stern a master, but now, imagining a worse lot as she faced Dod Theaker again and shrank from the drop of spittle that soon must spray from his lower lip, she determined to serve Major Waldron with all her will—if only he would preserve her from this repulsive settler. Her back already against the furled mainsail, she could retreat no farther. Without caring whether

she offended him or not, she slipped aside and ran up the ramp, neither looking back nor dropping her skirt until reaching the major's side. Soldiers and villagers eyed her curiously, but Major Waldron, merely glancing at her as if he thought her present all the while, continued speaking:

"Any Injuns been about?" he asked the lieutenant.

"A few Sacos. Told 'em as how they'd best be off trappin'—seein' 'tis December already. Gave 'em nothin' like ye said, Major. Went on up river as tame as ye please, two canoes full. Wager they won't show up again till spring."

"Back to the forts now—all o' ye! An' see ye bar the gates." With that Major Waldron strode off the wharf, followed by the noisy populace who presently divided into five groups and diverged toward the separate palisades. Wilhelmina, keeping close to the major's heels, cast anxious glances back at the river, but no canoes manned by painted savages floated down on the current. Indeed the folk directly behind her seemed unafraid of an attack, for they spoke of household matters or yelled parting words to their neighbours as if all were well. Nevertheless Wilhelmina was relieved to enter the nearest stockade and to stand beside Major Waldron while the soldiers closed and barred the gate with a heavy oak plank. And then, secure from dangers outside the wall of sharpened stakes, she anxiously turned to survey her new home.

In the thickening gloom the sprawling log house had the aspect of a formidable prison that might engulf her forever. Major Waldron was striding on in advance, but now he halted, and frowning, beckoned her to follow.

"What ails thee, girl?"

Though his tone was irritable she hurried forward. "Nothing," she replied lamely, reluctant to confess her misgivings. If she were to avoid Dod Theaker she must prove herself invaluable as a servant to Major Waldron. Otherwise, as Dod

Theaker had suggested, this gaunt old man might seek to be rid of her. Even now his intentions were uncertain.

"If only I'd learned to cook," she thought ruefully, recalling the kitchen at Roebury which she had seldom entered. Almost hopefully, remembering the unfinished needlework stored in the hutch at home, she looked up at the preoccupied soldier whose long strides forced her to run alongside. "I can sew!" she exclaimed before realizing that her cry was that of a desperate child.

"Sew?" His look was both stern and puzzled. For a few strides there was no sound except the soft padding of his moccasins and the rapid clicks of her shoes on the frozen mud of the enclosure. And then: "Thou'lt have scant time for sewin'. 'Tis milkin', churnin', and washin' thou'lt engage in —for seven years." He led her to a door near the extreme end of the largest building. "Here thou'lt abide," he announced, lifting the latch and shoving her inside.

A whale oil lamp and a hearth fire cast yellow light on the log walls of a kitchen large enough to house several menials although only one sharp-nosed, red-faced woman, still on hands and knees just beyond a patch of freshly scrubbed floor, looked up through strings of hair. She was, Wilhelmina immediately learned, as despotic as she was perverse. No sooner had Major Waldron quit the kitchen than Penitence Scythe stood up, dropped her sodden brush on the floor, and pointing at it with a long, reddened finger, stared at Wilhelmina so meaningly that the scold's quick words were unnecessary:

"What fer ye chafe yer hands by the fire? Cold? Well, ye can warm yerself with that brush!" Irritated by the girl's slow obedience, Penitence kicked the huge brush. It slithered to Wilhelmina's feet. "Start in scrubbin'! Well? Ain't ye never had yer hands in a bucket afore?"

Had Penitence observed the small hands that seized the brush with the awkwardness of an infant, she would have

answered her own question. But she wanted no answer. She wanted only to find fault. Herself a drudge long accustomed to scoldings, she wanted a turn at scolding others, and so she took delight in the girl's helplessness, chastizing her endlessly.

"A bought girl, eh? Speak up! Yer a bought girl, ain't ye?"

Sensing in the woman's tone the superiority of a hireling over a slave, Wilhelmina bit her lip, partly to suppress her urge to retort, partly to restrain the deep sobs that seemed on the bursting point. To evade Dod Theaker she must prove her worth to Major Waldron, and so she must somehow please Penitence Scythe. Bitterly she realized that on the word of this pernicious woman depended her future.

"What ye restin' fer?" shrilled Penitence when Wilhelmina, flushed after an hour of kneeling and scrubbing, paused to brush the damp hair out of her eyes. "There's plenty more when that's done."

There was always more. More floors to scrub, more cows to milk, more dung to shovel. Frost cracked her lips and wrists during the winter. At times she despaired of ever seeing Gilbert again, at times all but forgot their coming child.

Penitence was the first to know, Major Waldron the next. Then all knew. But their knowledge only sharpened her distress. They had no pity—only scorn. They sneered openly of a weekday, whispered secretly of a Sabbath, and Major Waldron thundered down condemnation from his rude pulpit in the garrison house. Yet she endured it all: the taunts, the callous laughs, the rough hands of soldiers that only screams could fend, and worst of all—Dod Theaker.

Never absent for long at a time, he came more frequently in the spring to loiter within the stockade during the lengthening evenings. Given at first to loathsome advice, later to unwelcome supplication, he was content to bide his time, to lurk in her path like nothing so much as a wary wolf awaiting the time of her labor. And Penitence Scythe seemed in-

tent upon weighing her down with more work than she could bear, upon delivering her and her sin-begotten burden from evil, upon wedding her to Dod Theaker.

Major Waldron, prizing her services beyond her salvation, grew more considerate of her health and ordered Penitence to assume a greater part of the chores.

"Her time is nearing," he reproached Penitence late one night in April when she sat by the fire while Wilhelmina kneaded dough. "See she don't ail."

Those words were prompted by avarice, not kindness, she decided one day as she idly thumbed the pages of Major Waldron's ledger in the trading room. She had carried water from the well, had hung brimming kettles in the fireplace, had tidied the merchandise on the shelves behind the counter; and now, waiting for the water to heat before starting to scrub the grimy floor, she had a minute to spare. The name at the top of a page in the ledger caught her eye.

"Kan-ka-magus," she read. "Chief of Pennacook Tribe." She was about to turn another page when the Indian's name recalled a conversation with Penitence. "Why," she mused, "it was Kan-ka-magus that Major Waldron once seized!" The details of the story came quickly to mind, how the savages had been tricked into entering the fort, bound hand and foot, and sold abroad as slaves. Some few of the seventeen, Penitence had declared in an effort to frighten her, had found their way back, and were plotting vengeance. But old Kan-ka-magus, older now by ten years, had been unfit even then to labor on the plantations, and so he had been spared. Yet he still traded at the fort. Why?

She had no answer, and the question was soon forgotten as she studied Major Waldron's account with Kan-ka-magus.

"Why, the old rogue!" she exclaimed aloud. Major Waldron had deliberately copied an account, one that had been balanced and crossed out last year, over to the next page. But with this difference: Only half of the pelts received in trade

from the Indian were listed. Kan-ka-magus had gone off believing his account crossed out, as indeed it had been, but he would return to find himself in debt. "So," thought Wilhelmina, "it's even as Penitence said. Major Waldron cheats them from year to year, over and over again."

The kettles were hissing, demanding her attention. Walking between the counter and the shelves, she paused to examine a bolt of coarse muslin. Stiff with dressing, it was much too coarse for a baby's tender skin. How wretched it was! A rush of pity for her unborn child came over her as she contemplated the fine lawns to be had in distant Holland.

Lost in thought of what might have been, she turned away from the shelves, but for some minutes as she stared at the floor her eyes would not focus on the mud tracked in by the Indians during this first week of the trading season. She stirred only when voices, the deep tones of Major Waldron and the answering grunts of an Indian, became louder than the mumbling of the soldiers in the compound outside the open door. Quickly, lest Major Waldron take her to task for idling, she ran to the hearth, unhooked the kettle, and poured steaming water into the bucket. She wet a great square in front of the hearth before Major Waldron strode into the shop.

Behind him was an Indian. Except for a tuft of hair on the top of his head, his scalp was bald and sunburned. Wearing moccasins, leggings and a soft leather cape with neither sleeves nor armholes, he followed Major Waldron to the counter.

The Indian's entire family pressed through the doorway and piled their bulky loads of smelly furs on the center of the floor. Wide-eyed children stared at the merchandise, at the fireplace, at Wilhelmina. One, an active toddler with short hair as straight and black as her own, strayed toward the fireplace. The others, all of them clad in greasy blankets,

clustered shyly about their mother, a wrinkled hag who seemed twice the age of her husband.

The Indian inspected a musket, and some minutes later Wilhelmina heard him agree to the price. The merchant wrote in the ledger while the trapper fondled the weapon. Shortly Wilhelmina looked up from her scrubbing to see Major Waldron pouring black powder into a brass pan on the swinging scales. As if his fist were exactly a pound, he placed it on the other pan instead of using a counter balance, and Wilhelmina suspected that the pressure was less than its actual weight implied.

"One pound," he announced.

Dissatisfied with the weighing but resigned to the old man's cheating, the Indian watched sullenly. Only when it came to counting musket balls did the Indian protest. In his own strange language he counted the balls, grouping them in lots of ten, and then counting the lots. The next succession of rapidly sputtered words must have been an accusation of cheating, for the soldier-merchant laughed disarmingly and produced two handfuls of ball which satisfied the Indian.

As for the Indian's wife, she was content to watch the bargaining until Major Waldron, perhaps hoping to gain an advantage, drew a gill of rum from a keg at the end of the counter and offered the cup to the trapper.

At the end of an hour the Indian was not yet so drunk as to let Major Waldron take all the pelts in exchange for the few items that lay on the counter—the musket, powder and ball, two scarlet blankets, a handful of fishhooks and as many needles. He fumed and threatened in unintelligible volleys of words, to which Major Waldron merely shrugged. And yet Wilhelmina, totally ignorant of the language as she was, could not but guess that the Indian's gesture, a big X stroked with a forefinger in the air above the ledger, was a condemnation of the merchant's failure to cross out a previous account.

He was still raging when Wilhelmina finished her scrubbing and went to the kitchen.

The morning was nigh spent when the Indian appeared in the compound. Chancing to look through a window, she saw him doubled over his wife's shoulder. He was being carried toward the stockade gate. His dejected children followed close at their mother's heels. There was no sign of the musket. A boy dragged one scarlet blanket behind him and a girl clutched a handful of fishhooks or needles, and that was all. The musket, Wilhelmina decided with a twinge of pity that for a moment relegated her own troubles to the back of her mind, had been exchanged for one last drink of rum.

More and more Indians came to trade as the season advanced, but Wilhelmina's curiosity waned steadily as each burdened week took its toll on her strength. A leaden heaviness came over her limbs, retarding her pace and confining her thoughts to the mysterious stirrings within her—stirrings that frightened her into moments of breathlessness choked with wonder. She avoided the Indians as best she could, but her duties forced several encounters. Their shy children used the barn, squatting in the empty stalls and scaring her as totally as did their drunken fathers. On one occasion a squaw, after slinking furtive-eyed down the dim corridor behind the cows and vomiting a curdle reeking of rum and cheese, spied Wilhelmina shrinking against the end wall. The wrinkled squaw, Ah-tum-e-gun by name, halted and displayed her only beautiful feature, a row of teeth as white as the milk in Wilhelmina's pail.

But Wilhelmina could not return the smile. Too vividly had Penitence described the savages. They were, she recalled with a shudder as the squaw approached in the manner of one appeasing an unfriendly dog, as treacherous as maturing bear cubs. Wilhelmina cringed, but still the squaw advanced, shaking her head and throating harsh gutterals as if scolding a child. At arm's length she paused, smiled, and then pursed

her lips to croon a series of vowels as soft as her former consonants were hard. It was baby talk, strangely cooèd, yet somehow intelligible. Except for Penitence's warnings, Wilhelmina might have relaxed as the squaw extended a calloused hand and explored her throbbing breast and distended abdomen.

"No! Please! Please!" Begging for mercy, Wilhelmina clutched that corded brown wrist with both hands.

"Wa-sis" laughed the squaw. *"Wa-sis!"* She pried Wilhelmina's fingers from her wrist and patted her own rounded stomach. *"Wa-sis!"* she repeated, and then cackled a series of harsh phrases before shrugging as if her attempt to converse were hopless.

Still distrusting the squaw, yet perceiving that she too was pregnant, Wilhelmina felt a tide of relief flooding back into her being. Obviously the squaw meant no harm at the moment, but Wilhelmina had seen Indians maddened, if not by the use of rum, by the want of it. And this squaw was thirsting for more.

Indeed the squaw was already making signs, pointing toward the unseen shop and tilting an imaginary tankard above her leathery lips. *"Ak-webi!"* she repeated at intervals, all the while growing more and more insistent. *"Ak-webi!"*

Guessing that she was expected to steal rum from Major Waldron and hesitating to promise, Wilhelmina took advantage of the opportunity to leave the barn. When she entered the trading room Major Waldron was sorting pelts directly in front of the keg. She thought of asking him for a dram, but to ask would be to invite questions, and her answers would betray the squaw's hiding place. In that event the squaw would suffer a beating, would blame it on her, and would, as Penitence had so often repeated, remember the wrong forever. Always fearful of an Indian attack upon the fort, Wilhelmina dread the prospect of their squaws singling her out for special vengeance, and so she kept silence,

trusting that the squaw would tire of waiting and go. But in this she was to be disappointed. Toward noon a clamor arose in the yard. Wilhelmina left off churning and looked out the kitchen window. The squaw was lashed to the whipping post and Major Waldron was laying on with a length of braided rawhide.

"That poor woman—not even whimpering."

"Huh," snorted Penitence over her shoulder. "Poor woman indeed! They're used to whippin' an' don't feel no more pain than a mule. Now if 'twas t'other way round—that squaw a-dancin' an' Old Waldron trussed up—then ye'd hear somethin' would melt yer marrow."

Wilhelmina resumed churning, lifting the heavy plunger and pushing it down. The butter was gathering in lumps, collecting on the plunger and making the work unbearable. There was an ache in her back now, a screaming pain in her arms. "Penitence, did you ever have a baby?"

"Ye think I'd be slavin' here if I had sons to go to? Jick Scythe, he never was no good, not even at begettin'. What ye palin' fer? Is it a-comin'?"

"A pain. A little pain. Penitence, the butter. Will you do the gathering?"

"Ye've no pain! But ye think to get out o' work! Ain't nothin' will happen fer another week. Maybe a fortnight. So finish up the churnin' or I'll see the Major hears about it. Ye wouldn't want him decidin' sudden like, would ye? Well, 'tis jus' my word standin' between ye and Dod Theaker!

And so Wilhelmina endured the remainder of that day, the next day, the next. Water turned to lead in the buckets she carried from the well. Forkfuls of straw took on the weight of wagon loads. Armfuls of kindling became cords of firewood. At such times she would kneel and pray for strength to rise, and strength would come. Somehow her daily work was always done before she sought her couch in the kitchen.

She was gathering eggs in the barn when the hour came.

The hens laid their eggs here and there, some in the mangers in front of the cows, some in the loft. As was her habit, she climbed over the heap of hay at the bottom of the ladder, scaled to the loft, and searched the likely places in the mow. The hay was strewn about haphazardly. Mostly chaff, it sent dust swirling into the air to choke the sunlight that streaked through the cracks. Soon the summer harvest would fill the loft, for it was late in June now. Or was it early in July? Anyway it was three weeks since the grey hen, still clucking under the gable end, had begun setting on her dozen eggs. Perhaps the chickens had hatched already. Wilhelmina waded through the chaff and knelt over the nest. It was then that a rustling sound caused her to look and find Dod Theaker regarding her from beyond a pile of hay.

She turned, dropping the basket as she stumbled toward a rickety ladder fashioned of long poles and slippery crossbars of peeled spruce. As she clambered downward the falling hayseed caught in her throat. Looking up, she saw Dod Theaker descending, his elbows and knees alternating like the legs of a spider. Had she not looked up, had the falling chaff missed her eyes, she might have eluded Dod Theaker in spite of her awkward descent; but half blinded and choked with dust for a moment, she soon felt his moccasin on her hand. She jerked her fingers away. Whether she dislodged his foot or not she never knew. She only knew that there was a great pressure on her shoulder, that her own feet slipped off a rung, that in one instant she was dangling at arm's length, that in the next she was falling, turning, shrieking. It was like one of her dreams. Dod Theaker seemed to be leaping upon her. The squaw, Ah-tum-e-gun, seemed to be reaching up to seize her. In that instant of terror she felt the jolt of the squaw's iron hands in her armpits. Like crutches suddenly propped into place, the solid hands wrenched her shoulders, but the pain that must have resulted was lost in a greater agony. It was as if her body sundered, as if her legs

and hips kept falling, as if her bowels and heart were torn away. She must have lost consciousness then, for when the agonies resumed she was on her back, her teeth in her arm, her nails in her cheek. Or so it seemed after the black head of the squaw was gone from above her knees, for there in her forearm and there in her face were the insignificant pains of wounds, wounds that seemed so old that their causes could only be surmised. She tried to dwell on them, to exaggerate their severity, but nothing, not even the slow revival of life in leg and body, could relieve her anxiety. A thousand doubts assailed her before Penitence, a bleary face above a wavering ribbon of dark cloth, came to stare and stare. The splashing of water was scarcely audible to her, its soothing coolness scarcely felt. It seemed an age before a dozen hands lifted and carried her out of the barn, across the yard, and into the kitchen, another age before the drone of voices subsided enough to let her hear that tiny, distant, yet ever so wondrous wail of a living baby.

Presently she was asleep. At first her dream was untroubled. She awoke only when it seemed that they would not let her have her baby. And yet here the baby lay, in the crook of her arm, a squalling, squirming reality, a being so real as to make her laugh aloud at his resemblance to some crotchety, wizened, shrunken, bald-headed man of a thousand years. And then all at once he was handsome, more so than any baby ever born, though she had seen no other of his age. And so heavy! Why, she could barely help him wriggle to her breast. And so strong! There was no restraining those puny fists prodding so deep in her flesh. Suddenly, while he buried his face and exposed his scalp, her heart raced in panic as she saw the soft area on top of his head. A pulse was throbbing there. Was something wrong? Or did all babies have such fragile heads? She heard herself loudly demanding to know, heard the women answering, heard her heart

subsiding with the assurance that all was well. And then that other question. Was he a boy or a girl?

"Tell me! Oh tell me, Penitence!"

"A boy. A boy indeed, though yer likes don't deserve no such."

A boy! A son! She had never prayed, never so much as hoped for a son. A daughter had been all she had dared to dream about. But now a son! A son! "Oh Gilbert, if only you could know!"

So intense was her wish that for a moment it seemed he must somehow hear and answer. Later she would remember her present illness, remember that he was far away, but at the time she felt his nearness, felt that he was cupping his ear, listening for her words, and then cupping his lips, shouting back to her, trying to make himself heard. It was as if he were dead, as if his spirit were striving to communicate with her. Alive herself, she could not understand him although her struggles brought perspiration to her face. Presently the fever combining with the heat of the kitchen robbed her of consciousness again.

Chapter 9

THE JULY heat would persist for weeks, but at that moment he was as oblivious of it as he was of the machete in his hands. His thoughts were in Boston where perhaps she waited on some merchant's wife. A supposition? No, it was a hope, one that he dared not relinquish, one that kept him

from utter despair. For him it was too much to hope that she fared better, too painful to think that she fared worse. The sounds of chopping brought him back to the cane-field.

Glued to his skin by the sticky juices, the machete had not slipped from his hands. His fingers had relaxed their grip but they still encircled the handle—and would until he pried them open. His back, too, was still bent from the long hours of stooping and hacking at the canes, but now, after glancing to the rear, he straightened it painfully and turned. The overseers were not in sight.

The stifling air shimmered over long swaths of reaped canes that ended where the Negroes were loading them on mule carts. Beyond the slaves the stubbled plain undulated and wavered in the heat. Even the many and varied buildings of the sugar works—the curing sheds, boiling houses, mills, and streets of slave abodes—danced and melted in the haze.

"What ye envyin'? Them Africans?"

Gilbert turned. In front of him the sugar canes, growing dense and tall like enormously magnified grasses, hid the jungle beyond the field which by tomorrow night would be completely harvested. Coad, a Cornwall miner until transported to Jamaica, was regarding him out of one remaining eye.

"Envyin' them Africans won't de ye no good."

Gilbert looked down at Coad's foot and wondered if the cripple had the heart to attempt another escape. The planter had ordered the toes chopped off, but the overseer had cleaved away half the foot. Wrapped in a rag, it sent a shiver through Gilbert as he contemplated his own plan that might incur the same punishment. He looked past Coad and saw Tom Bullen peering around the corner of the field. It was too early in the afternoon to make a dash for the jungle, but Tom was keeping close watch on the overseers.

"No, Coad, I don't envy the black slaves," Gilbert said. "They've no hope at all."

"Hope? An' have ye any?" Coad pointed to his crippled foot. "That's what good it'll do ye—the block an' a machete."

"I've no mind to be taken again. Not alive anyway."

"An' no blame to ye fer that. Ye won't be spared like them Africans. How long ye bonded fer?"

"Seven."

"Seven. That explains why ye only tasted a lancewood switch when they caught ye last time."

Gilbert nodded, remembering his escape and recapture some months ago. The planter had been viewing the whipping of two Negroes when the hound-keepers had dragged in the last runaway, and as a consequence Gilbert had been flogged with the instrument ready at hand, a lancewood switch. The Negroes, valued as perpetual slaves, were usually spared the crippling punishment reserved for bondmen whose terms of service were limited to three years. Gilbert, indented for seven years, was valued almost as highly as a Negro, and as such he had been punished.

"Treated ye like a slave. Ye've hardly a deep scar on yer back. Ye'd fetch a good price from a Spaniard—nothin' much to show ye're a runaway. But I wouldn't advise ye to try it again. Them overseers—that black one fer certain—they's a-layin' fer ye, waitin' and' hopin' ye'll try again. An' this time they'll say ye put up a fight. Ye knows what that means?"

"Burning."

"Ever seen it done?"

"No."

"They stake ye down on yer back, and start on the hands and feet. Takes all night. But they bury ye like a Christian."

Gilbert scarcely heard him. "Trade places, Coad?"

He had cut some eight feet deeper into the cane-field than had Coad, and so the erstwhile miner agreed. An hour later Gilbert asked the same question of the next bondman, and by late afternoon Tom Bullen and Gilbert were working side by side at the western corner of the field.

"Whatever ye do," the red-bearded yeoman warned, "don't lose yer knife."

"Couldn't drop it if I tried," said Gilbert, pulling his left hand away from the sticky handle and flexing his stiff fingers. "Where to, Tom? Port Royal?"

"Not tonight. That's why ye was caught—headin' east. No, we light out west as soon's we're in the woods. We'll have an hour's start afore they brings up the hounds. There's a river off there. Rio Minho, they call it. Once we reach runnin' water they won't know which way we go."

"But a ship. . . ."

"We'll make Port Royal later—after a month o' hidin' out. Yer used to that, Gilbert, on the English moors."

A Negress was making her way along the front of the cane-field, serving water to the bondmen as she came. The pickaninny on her back was asleep, his nose flattened against her skin. She swung the yoke within reach and paused until Tom and Gilbert drank from the bucket. Accustomed to the taste of perspiration, neither of them spurned the warm, tainted water that had rinsed many a bondsman's beard. They quenched their thirst and resumed chopping at the canes. Now and again an overseer made his rounds, but on account of the heat none of the bondmen was whipped that afternoon or evening. For the most part the overseers were content to sit in the shade of the palmettoes which Gilbert, now that only a hundred yards of field was standing, could see above the tops of the sugar canes.

The sun declined into the palmettoes. There would be a few minutes of day, a few more of twilight, and then tropical darkness. Soon the overseers would come to herd the slaves back to the works some two miles in the rear. Tom peered around the corner of the field.

"Nobody in sight," he whispered. "Keep close."

They stole along the margin of the field to the corner near the jungle and then concealed themselves among the canes,

cutting a few and sticking them into the rich soil behind them. After the overseers passed, Gilbert and Tom did not wait for them to discover that two bondmen were missing. Instead they pushed their way out of the canes and ran toward the palmettoes.

Immediately, for the plantation had been cut from the lush jungle, their progress was obstructed by dense ferns, trees, and vines. One behind the other they crawled and wriggled through matted limbs and roots, but by the time an overseer shouted the alarm they had burst through the dense wall of undergrowth that grew in the sunlight at the edge of the jungle. Now, finding the shaded ground comparatively open, they ran west under fig and mahogany trees until the night forced them to grope blindly. Presently they were lost in a mangrove swamp, but not hopelessly, for the moon occasionally broke through the foliage. Wading now knee-deep in water, now ankle-deep in muck, they skirted the swamp, starting crocodiles that bellowed and fled from their route.

The swamp changed into the jungle again. Myriad fireflies and lantern beetles sparkled and glowed all about them. Springy groo-groos tore at their breeches and raked their naked chests and arms, but toward dawn the fan palms began to give place to silk-cotons and Spanish cedars, and at sunrise the jungle lay behind them.

A vast savanna stretched away to the west. Ever listening for the baying of hounds, they loped out on the semi-arid plain and followed their shadows among cacti, mesquites, and agaves toward the Rio Minho. At noon the stench of rotting fish assailed them, and breaking through the fringe of shrubs, they saw the empty bed of the river.

"Dry."

The vanishing river had left a trail of stranded mullet. Each looked at the other and then back the way they had come. They heard no baying in the distance.

"Won't make no difference," Tom declared. "No hound will smell his way through this."

They jogged northward up the dry watercourse, sending the scavengers wheeling into the sky. An hour brought them to the first of a series of rank ponds that gradually became a river. It grew in volume as they waded against the current, and in the late afternoon it poured out of the foothills.

They pressed on, climbing higher and higher into the jungle. Night overtook them in the mountains. Cold and hungry now, they kept on, found a pass, and at dawn looked down toward the invisible sea below the mists that enveloped the upper rain forest. Here the great tree ferns dripped continuously, refreshing them while they rested for the descent that was to occupy them the second night.

There was no hurry now. They found a stream pouring into the sea, built a hut of wild canes and fronds, and spent the time in hiding. Food was plentiful. Raw mullet, turtles, shellfish, and the fruits of the jungle sustained them as well as had the eternal cassava bread and molasses of the plantation.

Although they had planned to hide until the planters abandoned the search, Gilbert fretted at the end of the first week. To him each day of inactivity seemed a crime against Wilhelmina who must despair of their reunion. Soon, if not already, she would believe him faithless; and she would suffer disillusionment. The thought intensified his impatience to start for Port Royal.

"A plague on you, Tom! This waiting—I can't endure another day of it." Anticipating Tom's reply, Gilbert slashed angrily at a fan palm. He was surprised when the red-bearded yeoman seemed less determined to remain in hiding.

"When ye do find her, Gilbert, what can ye do?"

"I don't know," he had to admit. "But damme! Can't you understand? She's alone—alone."

Tom Bullen rubbed the sandflies off his bald head and

chewed awhile at the stub of a wild sugar cane. "All the more reason we wait," he mumbled out of the side of his mouth, "if ye hopes to see Boston at all. Better later than never. A few weeks o' hidin', an' chances is they'll think we got away. It won't do to show up in Port Royal yet—not with every trader in Jamaicy peelin' his eye fer this." Tom stroked his heavy red beard. " 'Tis a dead give-away—mine red, an' yers yellow."

"We'll cut them off. . . ."

But Tom would not be persuaded, and finally Gilbert was forced to agree with the older man. They waited a fortnight, and even then the journey along the coast was undertaken against Tom's better judgment. Venturing out of hiding-places only by night, they travelled east and then struck into the rain forest, heading south toward the port on the opposite side of the island. The distance was no great obstacle, but when they looked down from a mountain peak and saw the plain they were discouraged. Port Royal lay beyond a million acres of cultivated fields dotted with plantation villages.

Had they not been fugitives they could have walked to Port Royal that night, but as it was, after skirting village after village, now running, now crouching and listening, they were still on the plain when dawn threatened. They hid in a cane-field. Although they were insufferably hot and thirsty neither of them complained. The shouts of the overseers, the cracks of whips, and the wails of slaves kept both Tom and Gilbert in a state of vigilance that spared them thought of their present discomfort. Only when night came over the fields were they aware of cracked lips and raw throats, and even then their foremost goal was the harbor some miles to the south. A river straddled their route. They found a small outrigged canoe at the mouth of the river, paddled along the western beach of the harbor, and hid in a cove opposite the town.

Shipping crowded the placid anchorage. Masts and spars, as motionless as the palms of the Palisadoes, stabbed at the moonlit sky. Most of the hulls were dark, but here and there a lantern hung in the mazes of rigging.

Gilbert pointed to a ship lying near the fairway. "That one?" he suggested. "It's small—low in the water."

They paddled out to the fairway, avoiding the larger ships whose masters would not hesitate to impress fugitives or return them to planters. They climbed aboard the small ship and reconnoitered the deck, the forepeak, and the cabin which was feebly illuminated by a hanging lantern. The crew had gone ashore for a night in the licentious town where music, shouts, and laughter told of drunken revelry in the nearest streets. They cut the anchor rope and let the ship drift out the fairway on the tide, and by midnight they were half a mile outside the harbor.

Yet escape seemed hopeless until the offshore breeze rippled the dead water and sent them up to the lower yard. They broke out the great square sail of the mainmast, and then slid down to the deck, hauled on the ropes, and braced the sail at an angle so that presently it filled and urged the ship away from the hills.

As inexperienced as they were, Tom and Gilbert by this time realized that their prize, hardly a third as large as the *Charity*, was as crude a ship as ever slid down the ways. There were no ratlines on the shrouds, no blocks on the stays, no sheaves in the masthead cheeks. Her yards boasted four square sails, two on each mast. The fifth sail was a wretched triangle on the forward stay.

Chapter 10

TOWARD DUSK on the second day they made a landfall off to the north-east and knew they were approaching the passage between Cuba and Hispaniola. That night was one of constant vigilance, for by the chart in the cabin the passage ahead was scarcely fifty sea miles wide. It looked even narrower at dawn when lofty capes rose to port and starboard.

Both Tom and Gilbert were worn after days and nights of toiling on the deck and in the rigging, but neither could spare the other for a wink of sleep. The headlands were too near, the previously steady breeze too freakish.

"Why ye lookin' so glum?" Tom asked when he came up from the galley with biscuits and tankards of water.

"Something's wrong, Tom."

"What?"

"I don't know. It's just . . . Well, there's not a sail in sight—and this is a busy passage."

"They was sail a-plenty yesterday."

"And all running with the wind."

"That's so."

They munched biscuits in silence, and leaped to the lee tackle when the square sails luffed uncertainly. The sails filled again and urged the ship on her course, but an hour later Tom called down from the upper yard.

"Calm spot off to starboard."

Gilbert climbed the mainmast and scanned the sea. They were almost through the passage. The distant mountains rose high to port and starboard. Vagrant winds still roughened the surface, but a mile to the east the long swells rolled unruffled. The breeze was dying. Even while they stared the

ripples vanished over large patches of the glassy waves in the lee of Hispaniola, that hazy shore resembling a bank of low clouds on the horizon. To the west Cuba was still more distant.

"We're about through the passage," Gilbert observed, preferring to hide his disappointment under a show of enthusiasm. "It's only a lull in the wind, and when it freshens it will flow from the east again." He could not be certain, for the wind roses on the chart still bewildered him.

"So long as it don't blow down from the north—an' drive us back." Tom looked toward the unseen Bahamas that, according to Gilbert, lay beyond the Windward Passage. How two men could bring so clumsy a ship safe through the innumerable reefs and islands was a problem that he dared not anticipate. Given a moderate breeze the ship might be worked among them by day—but by night? Tom wished that the jettisoned anchor were catted to the bow.

As Gilbert slid down the mast he decided to have another look at the wind roses on the charts. Landing on the deck, he heard a sail falling slack, and looking up, saw the dead canvas swinging back and forth with the rolling of the ship. A few wispy clouds trailed like tattered pennants above the yards.

"I'm going below," he said wearily when Tom slid down the mast to the deck. "There's nothing can be done till it freshens. Better come too."

Exhausted, Tom welcomed the opportunity to rest. He looked at a coil of rope near the capstan in the shadow of the mizzen squares. "Don't trust that sky a mite," he yawned. "Best I keep watch."

"Sing out. . . ." But there was no need to express his thought. Tom would call him at the first breath of wind. Gilbert staggered toward the companionway.

Tom strolled aft along the tilting deck and sat down on the coil of rope, his back against the capstan. Before closing his eyes he saw Gilbert pause to look at the gauzy clouds. Tom

was gaining confidence in his yellow-whiskered shipmate, but now, shutting his eyelids against the burning glare of sea and sky, he saw Axford as a stripling who, exactly a year ago when Monmouth's rebels were flying before the King's dragoons, had been rash enough to wheel his little mare and come charging through the dawn mists. Instinctively Tom now felt his thigh as he recalled his own plight on that ill-fated night. Crippled by a musket ball, he had tried to escape with the others, but the rebels had left him far behind. Strange how he could not remember the agony of that struggle to escape the oncoming king's dragoons! But perhaps there had been no pain—nothing but the fear of a pike in his back after that last horseman had passed him and left him alone on the moor. Alone? Yes, except for the king's dragoons charging down upon him from behind he had thought himself alone—until young Axford, racing musket balls into the mist ahead, had checked his little mare. He had come galloping back in the face of the dragoons, had reined in beside Tom, had helped him onto the mare's back, and had ridden off in the morning fog.

Tom's recollection of that dash across the moor was so vivid that he muttered the same words that had come to him a year ago: "Reckless boy!"

Eyes still closed, Tom smiled, thinking how much the boy had changed. His bones had matured and spread his chest and shoulders until new his skin appeared too tight for his frame. Indeed the crisscrossing scars on his back often gave one the impression that his skin had stretched too much, had split under the strain, and had healed along the seams. Given a month of rest and food, those spare bones and lean sinews would hide themselves under smooth muscles.

Tom opened his eyes. Gilbert had vanished down the companionway. The ship, facing Cuba now, was pitching instead of rolling on the swells. Not a single gull wheeled overhead. Tom wiped the drops from his forehead and wished he knew

more about the sea. The damp, motionless air was hot, and yet he was not thirsty enough to get up and stagger to the butt. He closed his eyes, fell asleep, and woke after dreaming that he had whistled up a gale.

To his delight the sails were popping lazily in the afternoon breeze. The ship was moving west, but even on its present course it would clear the northernmost beaches of Cuba. Tom ran to the helm, swung it over still further, and watched the flapping sails bulge with the wind from Hispaniola. He lashed the helm, hurried to the companionway, and called excitedly to Gilbert.

The wind stiffened hour by hour, heeling the ship over to leeward and driving her north. At first the men exulted, but toward evening when the clouds mottled the sky they worried lest their speed carry them into the myriad islands during the night.

"Trim uppers?" Tom shouted the question when a seething green swell poured over the lee rail.

Gilbert agreed. But the task proved beyond their strength. Tug as they might, they could not furl the bursting canvas. In panic, for a terrific blast laid the masts low over the mounting waves, they cut the uppers loose and let them soar away in the gale. Darkness brought sheets of horizontal rain out of the east. Thoroughly alarmed they cut away all but the staysail over the bow and let the ship run before the shrieking hurricane.

"The hatches!" Tom yelled in Gilbert's ear. They were both clinging to the rail and staring at a sea that washed the deck astern. It seethed near the open hatch. Gilbert felt the brine tugging at his legs. He waited until the water poured out of the scuppers, ran with Tom to the hatch, and struggled with the bars. They were still clinging to the cringles when the next wave poured down on the poop and came roaring forward to engulf them for long breathless seconds and to leave them stranded with legs extending

toward the bow. Expecting a third sea, they made haste to batten down and to bolt the cabin door, and thereafter clung to the rail throughout the night while the tempest raged with ever-increasing fury. Coils of rope snaked up and down in the wash of the deck. The knee-deep, sometimes waist-deep brine washed about them at irregular intervals, but when dawn changed the sky and sea from black to grey the deck was bare of all unsecured tackle.

Miraculously the bellying staysail had held. Miraculously the ship itself had struck none of the islands that Gilbert now and then glimpsed to port and starboard as he wrestled with the helm. In the lashing weather he saw an island, a dismal patch of blackness rising out of a lathering reef. He had a brief impresion of palm trees bending away from the wind like umbrellas blown inside out, and then a hill of black water and white froth heaved up in the foreground. The ship plunged into a deep valley sheltered from the hurricane. The staysail hung limp and then clapped with the shock of the blast as the steep walls of the valley flattened out and became the slopes of a mountain.

Gilbert saw the island again, a tuft of vegetation in a welter of spray off to starboard. He glanced over the bows in time to glimpse a grey rock stabbing through the turbulence. At once it bobbed under a white splash as if it were a stone tossed down from the sky. About three ship lengths ahead, it reappeared like the snout of a blowing whale. With a yell of warning to Tom, Gilbert laid all his weight on the helm. A minor wave slapped the rudder, jerked the bars out of his hands. Holding his breath until the drenching spray flew past, he worked the helm back again. As the ship tilted down in the trough the stern lifted high so that for one hopeless instant Gilbert saw the white base of the rock above the bowsprit. As might a frightened horse the ship reared back, hesitated, and leaped high. For an instant it seemed that she must fall on the rock, for indeed Gilbert had the sensation,

now a familiar one, of physical lightness as the plunge began. Down he went with the sinking deck. But there was no rending crash. As the ship reared again he looked astern and saw the rock lunging upwards out of a trough. It seemed alive, a blind, frustrated, monstrous fish that immediately sounded in preparation for another lunge at the bait dancing on the surface.

Gilbert took a breath of brackish rain and spray before the ship dropped into a breathless chasm. The bottom of the sea arrested the descent. The shock buckled his knees and sent him sprawling flat on the deck. Almost at once an immense volume of water beat down upon his back. For as long as he could govern his bursting lungs the smothering flood washed him back and forth over the deck. He caught at a bolt ring, felt it pull out of his fingers, and then the water rushed away, stranding him against the rail. One leg protruded through a scupper hole. The outboard clapper valve jammed his ankle as he tried to escape. Another sea crashed over the stern, came rolling forward. He gasped and held his breath again, glad that his foot was caught. The ponderous weight tumbled away, let him breathe for a moment, and then the whole thunderous ocean seemed to rise up and engulf the rigging. He lost his breath as the roaring water crashed down upon him, and yet when the deck was clear he was alive and sensible to the pain of a wrenched and skinned ankle. The force of the wash had freed his foot.

"Tom!" His call was scarcely more than a gasp. Again and again while the blinding lightning split the black sky he shouted. There was no answer, none that he could hear. Dazed and crippled, he crawled the length of the ship which now rode the easier seas in the lee of the rock and the shallow bank.

"Tom!" Gilbert forgot his injured ankle and stumbled to the taffrail. Beyond the stern the wake was lost in the thrashing seas, but halfway between ship and rock the wind was

tearing at the crest of a wave and hurling a triangle of canvas after the ship. The jib! Gilbert looked forward and saw that the sail was missing. And now a flash of lightning disclosed tangles of loose rigging whipping the sky. An instantaneous explosion deafened him to all subsequent noises except the beating of pulses in his head. For some seconds he thought he was blinded, but during the next interval of brilliance he saw an island straddling the bows of the ship. About a mile distant, it was not to be avoided even if the staysail had held, for it projected a league to port and starboard.

"Tom!"

The hisses of the wind and the creaking of the ship became increasingly loud as his eardrums recovered, but another blinding flash and a deafening thunderclap stunned him momentarily. When he regained his senses the island was gone. Straining his eyes into the darkness ahead, he was suddenly thrown against the rail. Instinctively clinging to it, he felt his legs slide across the deck. It was then that he knew the truth: The ship, no longer pitching stem to stern, had turned at right angles to the seas and was now rolling port and starboard. The island, though he could not see it now, was square abeam. He stared down wind until like a low cloud the island appeared above a white horizon.

A sea crashed down from behind and flung him across the deck, but when it ran off he was still aboard. Aware that no ship could withstand so terrific a pounding on the weather hull, he half crawled, half floated to the companionway leading down to the galley, and opened the door. A cascade of brine followed him down the steps. Utter darkness enveloped him now. Sloshing through ankle-deep water, he found one of the casks intact in its brackets against the wall. He turned the spigot and felt the fresh water gushing out. With a meat axe he tapped the staves around the bung atop the cask. The resulting hole was as big as his fist. Without waiting for the cask to empty itself, he scurried about the galley,

found a butcher's knife, a set of flints and steels, and Tom's machete. These he dropped into the bunghole before discovering a length of rope which he wound and knotted around the cask—around its belly once and around its length twice. In all his haste he had the presence of mind to knot the rope securely, but now, after waiting long minutes for the fresh water to drain out of the cask, he could not find the bung in the deepening water that swished about his knees. After a few moments of panic he located a rag, plugged the hole, shut the spigot, and released the cask from its brackets.

Water sluiced down the companionway as he struggled to push the cask up the steps. A particularly voluminous flood washed him down to the dark galley. Battered but insensible to the blows, he caught the rope and backed up the companionway—slowly, letting the cask rise with the deepening water that now welled up out of the galley. The ship, he realized, was quickly foundering. The seas had staved in its hull. With the strength of panic he jerked the cask up step by step and finally dragged it onto the deck. Immediately it rolled and slid to the lee rail.

The island was much nearer. Silhouetted against almost continuous lightning, it never quite vanished below the swells. Through the spume and rain he had a glimpse of trees, but it was the surf in the foreground that held Gilbert's attention during the brief moment while the ship wallowed atop a wave. No more than two furlongs distant, the seas were breaking on an extensive reef that tossed up columns of brine and clouds of spray.

Gilbert locked his arms in the ropes at the end of the cask and caught a breath before tons of ocean engulfed the ship. For a while all was dark. Bubbles gurgled about his ears. When at last he bobbed to the surface he saw the ship struggling up, shedding a river of brine toward him. It rose as on a pinnacle. Looking up, Gilbert glimpsed the barnacles on her hull, and then, looking down, saw that her hatch had

burst inward. Even in the comparative calm of the trough the waves washed her decks and poured into her hold.

Towed by the nearly empty cask, Gilbert soon lost sight of the ship as a countinous sea heaved up in his wake. Nor did he look back again, for the great waves, gathering volume now as they approached the shallows, threatened to dislodge his arms from the ropes. The cast rolled unpredictably, often forcing his head beneath the surface, but always he managed to catch a breath when it seemed his lungs must burst. And now he glimpsed the rocks—impacted rows of menacing white teeth snapping at the waves. One instant they were far below him, the next instant above. He saw the cavities in their white enamel, and then a huge wave hid them as might a black lip. The wave exploded into surf that caught the lightning and blinded his eyes. He had the sensation of falling, of rising again as though in a gigantic swing, and then he thought himself tossed up to the clouds. A gasp for breath filled his lungs with spume. Before losing consciousness he sensed that he had been flung over the reef and into the lagoon, but it was not until the gentle heart of the storm hovered over the island that he was aware of the white sand under his face and the burning thirst in his throat.

Slowly, painfully, he accepted reality. Brine had adulterated the water in the cask. Between the bleak white dunes on the island the brackish swamps supported only mangroves, but farther inland the cavities in the solidified dunes brimmed with rainwater. He drank and returned to the beach where wreckage—tangles of rope, a demijohn, planks, another cask—strewed the white sands.

Within a week his raft was finished and loaded with crabmeat packed in the abundant salt of the island. At the end of the second week, after another tempest supplied rainwater for his casks, he raised his thatch sail to the tradewind that urged him slowly westward from island to island.

Now and then he sighted vessels at sea. On such occasions,

so intense was his longing for companionship, he was tempted to steer toward them and signal. For long minutes he would forget what capture meant, forget the plantations of Jamaica, the mines of Spanish America, the gibbets of England. There came times, of course, when such terrors were welcome, but always he remembered Wilhelmina, lowered his mast, lay flat on the deck, and let the unknown vessels sink below the horizon.

It was during October or November of 1687 that misfortune struck. After landing on what appeared to be the last island of the archipelago, he made ready to venture out upon an empty and seemingly limitless expanse of ocean. He hoped that Florida and not the Gulf of Mexico lay beyond the horizon. He had no idea how far he had come or how far he had to go. He only knew that he would require more water and food than he had used during the earlier and shorter voyages. And so he took extreme pains to provision his raft. It was just after he put to sea early one morning that a brigantine, her mainmast broken and her canvas riddled with holes, rounded the tip of the island and came sailing down close to the lee shore. Not more than a quarter-mile distant the flag of Spain fluttered from her fore-topmast. She was anchored in deep water.

Gilbert was quick to lower his thatch sails, but he was seen. While he paddled ashore a crew of six rowed toward him. Soon to be overtaken if he remained on the barely moving raft, Gilbert emptied his demijohn, replaced the cork, thrust the machete under his rope belt, and plunged into the water. Buoyed up by the demijohn, he swam to the shallows flanking a sand pit, and ran to the island proper. A musket ball splintered a mangrove as he plunged into the coppice growth.

Ten miles long and half as wide, the island provided scant cover during those days of sleepless vigilance. He ate raw rodents, the only vertebrates other than lizards and birds

inhabiting the desolate island. Rainwater was plentiful in an elevated pond, but when the Spaniards sailed away he had no cask to fill. The raft and all his prizes execpt the demijohn and machete were gone.

That winter was one of frustrations and anxieties, a continuous struggle to stay alive on this most westward island in the sea. He had no fire, for none of the soft rocks emitted sparks when struck with the machete. Seaweeds, withered plums, rodents, crabs, and fishes kept him from starvation, but he had scant hope of ever leaving the island. Although he built a raft of small logs and driftwood, he could fashion no receptacle for storing an adequate supply of rainwater; the skins of the rodents were too porous, the trees too small, the earth too crumbly.

The season of the hurricanes was almost upon him when in desperation he resolved to attempt the long voyage. Without sufficient water he knew that success would depend on luck, the weather, and the unknown distance to land. But he had to go. Although he could survive on this island until rescued by some passing ship, he could not wait. He had to go to her at once or never.

And so, while the declining sun glowed red on the ocean, while it seemed that the ever-rumbling sea hushed to let him hear her calling him, he made his way to the rainwater pond. He drank all he could hold, filled the precious demijohn, and bathed the salts from his skin.

Before the sun rose in the morning to boil the fluids from his body he would be far on his way. The sun was sinking quickly now. It went down as he followed the foot-worn path toward the beach. About him the shadows of palmettoes merged into night.

Chapter 11

SHADOWS WERE enveloping Wilhelmina too. She quickened her step, waved her switch at the bawling calf, and drove him toward the village that lay beyond pasture and grainfield. The calf plunged into a deep hollow, reappeared in the twilight, and dodged off to the right. Racing across the humpy pasture, she headed him off and once more forced him away from the edge of the forest where the head of his cow lay in gore. Now and again she glanced over her shoulder. Once she stopped to hold her breath and listen, hearing nothing save the thudding of hoofs and the pounding of her heart. The Indians, she decided, had not seen her. After quartering the cow they had retired to their wigwams farther up river. There was no real danger, she told herself. The Indians had killed a cow, not a man. True, they had been sulky of late, even hostile, but not a single act of savagery had been committed. The slaughter of one cow was no sign that another Indian war was imminent. Nevertheless, after the calf swerved abruptly and galloped in a great circle to elude and outdistance her, she followed him toward the forest for only a short distance. The twilight was feeble now, the shadows of the somber evergreens scarcely distinguishable from the overall darkness. She turned and ran down the path. Between fences bordering the corn on the right and the wheat on the left, it led straight to the village. She was breathing hard when her fists pounded against the gate of the central stockade.

Major Waldron himself let her in. With a scowl on his face and the gate's bar on his shoulder, he seemed of a mind

to crush her bodily. Lantern light exaggerated the deep lines in his brow.

"Godless slattern! Thou'st come from makin' another bastard?"

Inured to insults during the years, she hardly resented such words nowadays. Except for his terrible wrath she would have ignored his accusation, but his hands gripped the oak bar so mightily that she cried out in fright:

"Indians! A cow was missing from the herd. I went to find. . . ."

Major Waldron fairly threw the heavy bar into its cleats on the closed gate. With his veined but powerful hands, hands that by his own admission had broken the back of a savage over his knee, he tried the gate, shaking the ponderous structure until it rattled. Only then did he turn to demand:

"Injuns?" That one word was all he had heard. "Where?"

"Penitence bade me find the strays—a cow and a calf. The cow was dead. The Indians, I think."

"An' the calf? Well, speak!"

"Still in the pasture. I tried to drive. . . ."

"So! Lost the calf!"

That last word was little more than a grunt as he swung his broad palm at her head. Had she been unaccustomed to brutal punishment her cheek would have suffered the full impact of that cuff, but the blow fell on the arms that covered her face. Even so, she reeled dizzily against the gate and cowered while Major Waldron thundered pious recriminations at her and bellowed at his soldiers. They came with pikes and muskets. The faces were those of soldiers long restricted to monotonous sentry duty in the fields by day and in the stockade by night. Somehow they reminded Wilhelmina of hounds coursing from their kennels and eagerly scenting their quarry. Major Waldron waited until the sound of running feet ceased.

"Ferguson! Stone! Rogers! Quarles! Ye'll up to them Sacos' camp an' stir their pots. A cow! Missin', and likely ate up by now. But ye'll find something—bones or inwards. Ye know the rest."

Wilhelmina avoided them and hurried to the kitchen. Penitence Scythe, rocking in the hickory chair, hugged the boy tighter as the door opened to reveal the mother. But the child only squalled the louder as Penitence all but smothered his mouth. It angered her to think that Jem would stop crying as soon as that woman claimed him again and murmured her meaningless words. Penitence envied that woman in the doorway. That she could not exactly hate her very long at a time she knew from experience, but during this one moment, while the boy squirmed on her knee, her envy turned to hatred. Through jaundiced eyes, forgetting that Wilhelmina could not choose her own wardrobe but must wear what Major Waldron so niggardly selected, Penitence saw a menial in a homespun garment lacking both hoops and stays. Loose about her bosom, it was lapped more snugly about her narrow waist and tied with a cord. The skirt hardly reached to her bare ankles, and except for the seam running down the front, might have exposed her knees as she walked. Woven of both white and dark wool, it had been dyed a uniform black, but the dye had faded from much washing and now the cloth was mottled. Below it were plain moccasins without either beads or buckles. But it was the bondwoman's black hair that gave Penitence a measure of satisfaction. Always long and straight, it had been tangled either by wind or bushes, and now it looked more like a squaw's than ever. Thus Penitence found means to justify her self-righteousness.

That black-haired hussy didn't deserve no son. Coming here like that an' letting on she was a lady down on her luck. Anyone could see she was pretty enough for a kept-woman—a kept-woman cast off by some gentleman. Or else why was

she sold? And did she come right out and say she was a lady? No. Just put on like one. Her an' her little hands and her spells of crying! Well, her hands wasn't no sight to look at twice now! Come two or three more summers of squinting in the fields and her face would wrinkle up just like anyone else's. Like a squaw's!

Wilhelmina, scraping her moccasins on the hewn threshold, looked back at Penitence. Although her son should be asleep she could not quite blame the woman, childless in spite of her ten years of marriage, for taking him out of the clothes basket. He was a darling even if he did squall every time Penitence picked him up. Poor woman! She did so much want a baby! Wilhelmina was tempted to let her hold him a while longer, but his wailing tore at her heart, and so she hurried forward. Although his crying stopped as her hands slid beneath him, her emotions were mixed. The pleasure of comforting him was offset by the hurt look in the woman's eyes, but her pity for Penitence was short-lived, for the small hands that clung to her dress and the wonderment in his clear, blue eyes soon occupied all her senses. She sat down on her couch and leaned against the logs of the wall, holding him on her lap and humming a wordless tune. She wanted to hold him forever, but she had work to do. She was tired. She knew it long before the bread dough was rising on the hearth, long before the sputtering lamp was refilled with whale oil.

And so the days went by. Penitence took pleasure in sparing her more and more for labor in the fields, in letting the household work accumulate for her return at dusk. It was as though Penitence sought to win the boy away from his mother, to crush her under staggering burdens. But Wilhelmina was older now, and stronger—as strong, she decided one day after tossing an immense forkful of hay onto the wagon, as strong as any peasant girl. Her body, now that little Jem was weaned, could endure it all. It was her restless mind

that suffered. Her mind was like the changing sky, at times overcast with the shadows of death whenever she despaired of Gilbert, at other times radiant with the dawn of life whenever she marveled at the reality of his son. Somehow, while watching Jem in the sunshine, it was impossible to believe his father dead. It seemed that one could not exist without the other. How alike they were! The same yellow curls, the same puzzled eyes, and a sunburned little nose that just possibly might grow as straight as Gilbert's.

Time was sluggish in spite of her crowded days. The spring of 1689 came after an age of waiting. The mud dried in the yard. At last the ploughing was done, the land sown with grain, beans, and potatoes. Green blades pierced the corn fields. Cows grazed in the pasture. Birds sang.

And Wilhelmina took heart, for now she need no longer leave Jem with Penitence. He could follow her to the fields on sunny days. Almost three years old, he could run at her side as far as the pasture. Oh, he was a fine boy! His father would be amazed!

June was a month of strange rejoicing. She could not understand her emotions. Nor did she try. It was better to believe her heart, to trust that soon the torment would be over and done. Somehow Gilbert seemed near. She knew it. She felt it. Presently he would come. Often she let her hoe idle between the rows of beans and surveyed the fringes of the clearings. Her heart would balk whenever some man, too distant to identify, emerged from the forest. When Major Waldron returned from Boston she was the first to see the grey sails of the sloop on the river. Gilbert might be aboard. So hopeful was she that in her hurry to meet the sloop she almost forgot Jem. He was chewing a carrot pulled from a drill. She caught him up and ran across the fields to join the excited throng on the wharf.

There were breathless minutes while the sloop sailed closer, long unbearable minutes that ended in disappoint-

ment. She was about to turn away when the news rushed like wind through the crowd: The king had fled England.

The king? James? The tyrant who scourged the Westland? For a while the full meaning of the news made little impression on Wilhelmina. It was all so long ago—the rebellion in the west, the flocking to Monmouth's colors, the route of the rebels at Sedgemoor. So much had happened since Gilbert had ridden off with her father and brothers that her memory was dulled, her reactions slow. The king had fled? Why? When? Not until the whole story was clear did she begin to realize what it meant to her. And even then she could not exult. That the Prince of Orange had crossed the English Channel with a mighty army, that King James had fled, that Judge Jeffreys had died in the Tower—were too fantastic to believe. And yet she had heard aright. The soldiers on the wharf were questioning, the men aboard the sloop answering:

"Landed in November, ye say?"

"Aye. The king run off to France without a fight, he did."

"An' the Prince of Orange? Crowned?"

"Him an' his wife. King and queen they be."

It was all so incredible. Jeffreys, the same judge who had convicted her father and brothers, had disguised himself as a Newcastle miner, had shaved off his heavy eyebrows, had sought to escape the vengeance of the populace by taking ship. A citizen had recognized him in a tavern. And now he was dead.

"Fer certain 'tis true! Heard it a dozen ways an' on the Book, I did. Why, there was a risin' up in Boston when they heard o' it."

There was more news, news of hostilities in the district of Maine, that wilderness to the north of New Hampshire. A band of marauding Indians had attacked an English outpost scarcely two leagues distant from Cocheco. Soldiers of Boston had sailed up the coast and burned Castine in French

Acadia. The Abenaki tribes—the Sacos, Androscoggins, Kennebecs and Sheepscots in Maine, and deep in Acadia the Penobscots, Passamaquoddies and Malisetes—were holding council. War might come to America again, war between the French and Abenakis on the one side and the English and Iroquois on the other.

Wilhelmina heard it all, heard the women's anxious questions, the men's grave answers, the ominous hush that fell over the crowd. On every hand mothers pressed children to their sides, cast worried glances at the Forest. Men primed their muskets. An Indian war, it seemed, was one of terror. Instinctively Wilhelmina hugged her son until he cried out in pain. As if the cry disturbed men and women deep at prayer, the silence turned into clamor.

"No tellin' when. Them Sacros—ain't seen a one o' 'em in a month. Something's up. Back to the gates, an' bar 'em."

Presently Major Waldron's voice rose above all others:

"Get that sloop unloaded! Lay in what stores we have. Come tomorrow we sail for another cargo."

She turned with the women and hurried toward the stockades. It mattered not if the beans were cultivated. The Indians would destroy the crops. None berated her for taking shelter behind the gate. All were grave, forgetful of the past and present, mindful of the future only.

She led Jem into the kitchen, sat down on her couch, and lifted him to her lap. The door was open, but the voices in the yard grew indistinct. The pots and cranes in the fireplace blurred. Deep in thought, she was sensible of nothing save the tightness in her chest and the squirming weight of her son.

For three years she had been content to survive, to wait in Cocheco where one day Gilbert might find her. The thought of going elsewhere had never troubled her mind until this hour. There had been no place to go. But now that Jem was

in danger she must leave this doomed settlement. But how to get to England?

Seated on her lap, Jem was toying with her seal. He had spied a link of the gold chain and had pulled it out while she was lost in thought.

"What is that?"

"A seal, Jemmy. It makes a design in wax. See? A windmill. And a sheaf of wheat."

"Windmill? What is that?"

She answered his score of questions. Where did it come from? Her mother, his grandmother, had given it to her long ago. And where did Grandmother get it? From the Prince of Orange. Who was the Prince of Orange? He was a distant cousin to Grandmother. And now he was the King of England.

"Eng-land? Where is Eng-land, Mama?"

"Across the ocean—a long way." For a moment she was home at Roebury, smelling the garden below her window, hearing the throstles in the ivy. She must have been thinking aloud, for Jem was asking:

"Can we go there, Mama? Can we?"

She did not answer. It was too uncertain. So much could transpire during the months before her letter, if indeed she succeeded in despatching one, could reach Whitehall and be answered. It was possible, too, that William of Orange might not remember the seal. No, she could not promise her son. "It's so far, Jemmy," she evaded, holding him tighter in an attempt to hide her trembling.

"Mama, why you crying?"

Suddenly she was conscious of his wet finger tracing the path of a tear on her cheek. She tried to smile, tried to suppress her misgivings. Surely Gilbert was alive. Surely he would come. Surely, when he found her gone, he would follow her to England. Yes, she argued, if William of Orange remembered the seal and invited her home, then he would

welcome Gilbert also. She would explain it all in her letter.

And she did. On pages torn from Major Waldron's ledger that same night she wrote to the King of England. At best a childish scrawl, her scrip was rendered almost illegible by a clumsy hand that had not held a quill for years. Over and over again, ever listening for the sound of footsteps outside the door of the trading post, she copied the letter. Toward midnight she was satisfied with the fifth draft. After lighting a splinter at the whale-oil lamp, she held the flame to a stick of sealing wax, let a drop fall on the paper opposite her signature, and impressed her seal upon it. Then, after folding the letter, she sealed it at the flap and at both ends.

That done, she stole out to the unguarded gate. To lift one end of the oak bar out of its cleat and ease it to the ground demanded all her strength. To lift it shoulder high and replace it would be beyond her ability. In the morning the gate would be discovered unbarred. Major Waldron would surely punish her. But it was too late to revise her plan. She slipped through the gate and hurried down to the wharf.

One man only stood guard aboard the sloop. She could see his profile clearly against the moonlight on the water. He was Josh Meede, a man whom she could not trust with her letter. Lying flat on the wharf, she waited until the watch changed, until Dod Theaker took his turn on the deck.

Long ago, shortly after Jem was born, he had desisted in his repugnant courtship, but he had not abandoned his desire for a wife, any wife. During the past year he had made the trips to Boston regularly, but on each occasion he had returned without a bride. No woman would have so ugly a husband.

"Dod," she called in a whisper. "Dod Theaker."

He gripped his musket, faced the wharf. With the moon behind him his darkened face was less repulsive. "Who be ye? An' what ye want this hour?"

"Be quiet, Dod Theaker. I'm Wilhelmina come to ask a favor."

Lowering his musket, he approached as if bewildered. His mouth was agape when the gunwale stopped his advance, when his face was close to Wilhelmina's above the edge of the wharf. Perhaps it was astonishment that kept him silent until she spoke again:

"This letter—I want you to post it for me."

"In Boston? A letter?" He took it in his hands, turning it over and staring at the address although he could not read. "Ye writ it? Ye? Yerse'f?"

"Yes. It's for the King of England. The king!" Deliberately she tried to impress him with its importance. "When the king reads it he will send me gold—enough to pay you well."

"Gold?" He seemed impressed.

Thus Wilhelmina persuaded him to deliver the letter to some seaman in Boston. In awe Dod Theaker listened to her explanations, in awe learned she was a lady. That she could write was proof enough for him. He swore that Major Waldron would never see the letter.

Back at the gate Wilhelmina struggled with the oak bar. Twice she managed to lift it waist high, but each time, after an agony of straining, her fingers slipped from the heavy timber. It thudded duly on the packed earth.

What to do? If she left the gate unbarred the Indians might chance upon it, might fall upon the sleeping garrison. Everyone within the stockade might suffer for her act. But if she called soldiers to bar the gate Major Waldron would punish her. Caught in a dilemma, she sought another alternative and found it. Not for nothing had she helped with the haying last summer. She knew how to use the blocks and ropes stored on the wall of the harness-room in the barn.

Quietly, lest the men awaken, she hurried across the enclosure. A cow lowed as she selected the blocks and rope.

Burdened as she was her progress back to the gate was slow. A wooden block rattled as she climbed the gate, but by grasping the cleats and cross-pieces she reached the top and hooked the double block to a sharpened upright. Laboriously and with patience she made all ready, and then hoisted the oak bar into position. The rope, which would have blistered her hands four years ago, had no effect on her hardened palms. A few minutes later, after hanging the tackle in the barn, she was bending over Jem.

How big he was! Although Wilhelmina saw him a hundred times a day she never ceased marvelling at his growth. And now, looking down at his browned face, she could scarcely believe him the same baby whom she had once nursed at her breast. Soon, in little more than a week, he would be three years old. Three years! He had been sleeping on his side when she had left, but during her absence he had rolled over on his back. The grey blanket had been tossed aside. Perhaps he had awakened and found her gone. But he had not cried at least not loud enough to arouse Penitence in the adjacent room. Oh, he was a wonderful boy!

She covered him up and lay sleepless on her couch until the hour before dawn. As usual she was the first to rise. A breakfast of corn meal was ready when the garrison trooped into the kitchen. During the meal none spoke of noises at the gate last night. Although relieved to know that she had not been detected, Wilhelmina was ill at ease even after the sloop dropped down the river an hour later. The remainder of that week seemed an eternity. Until the sloop docked on the evening of the fifth day she could think of little else besides the letter and what its safe despatch might mean to her and hers. She ran to the wharf, sought out Dod Theaker, and learned that the letter was in the hands of a sailor presently shipping from Boston to London.

That night her dream was a happy one. They were all mounting horses—not the hunters of Roebury but the plod-

ding jades of a frontier farm where turnips grew as big as cabbages. And they were laughing because the horses would not gallop. Jem was a big boy now, and not at all ashamed of his mother's broad hands as he would have been if they had gone to England. Yes, he was tall, almost as tall as his father, much taller than she. And now Gilbert was alighting, pulling a turnip out of the field, turning it over and over and marvelling at its size. He grinned and came toward her, extending the turnip close for her inspection.

Toward dawn she woke with a start. Breathing hard, she stared wildly about the kitchen. It had been a dream, and yet it had been so vivid that for a moment she could not comprehend the realities about her—the lamp burning on the table, the coals glowing on the hearth, the boy sleeping in his basket. Even when time and place righted themselves she could not compose her emotions, for it seemed that Gilbert was near, nearer to her than he had been in years.

An insufferable fear, the fear of doubting her joyous intuition in saner hours of memory, vied with her irrepressible excitement at the prospect of their reunion. The resulting distress was as intense as the anguish which she had suffered when they had parted at Boston.

She could not endure the stress, but neither could she fall asleep. Tossing on her couch she tried to concentrate on her letter to the king, tried to believe that it would reach London, tried to forget Gilbert in lesser worries. The letter. Where was it now? Lost? Thus Wilhelmina strove to subdue her tumultuous, unbearable anxiety. The letter. The letter. If it never reached England. . . . But it would. Even now it was in Boston, in a sailor's pocket.

Chapter 12

THE LETTER was in a sea-captain's waistcoat pocket. Breakfasting at an inn on King Street, he remembered the letter and patted his pocket, hearing the faint crackle of parchment. The letter intrigued him not because it was addressed to His Majesty at Whitehall, nor because it was sealed with a mysterious imprint, but because its writer had seen fit to send it in so unorthodox a fashion. Obviously the author, a personage of sufficient importance to possess a seal, hoped to undermine the governor's position in the colony, for otherwise the letter would have accompanied the official despatches on the regular packet.

"Bodes no good for Gov'nor Bradstreet," the sea-captain muttered with satisfaction. He smacked his blue lips as if he enjoyed the baked beans which the innkeeper, roused long before daylight by a guest impatient to quit Boston, had served cold. The beans stuck to his palate, and he bawled for coffee to wash them down. There was no answer from the scullery. Irritated, the captain transferred his dislike for Governor Bradstreet to the innkeeper.

"Step lively," he blasted, wishing that he had been bold enough to speak thus to the governor who had delayed his ship's departure. "Hold me up, will ye?"

"Anon, sir. 'Tain't a-bilin' yit."

Somewhat appeased by the man's respectful tone, the captain returned to his beans and then, remembering the letter, pulled it out of his pocket and examined the imprint of the seal. "A right high-mighty seal," he mused in silence. "Tw'n't no nobody write this letter. . . ."

A stranger, a tall, gaunt, clean-shaven man, was standing

at the foot of the stairway. He had the disappointed yet expectant look of a sailor who had missed a ship just pulling away from the wharf. The sea-captain had seen just such an expression on the face of a sailor whom he had stranded in Portugal. The only difference was that in the sailor's eyes there had been a terror of being deserted in a foreign port whereas in this stranger's eyes there was a hope of leaping across the gap. For an instant the sea-captain stared at the man's incongruously pale cheeks and dark forehead.

"Shaved off a beard," he surmised. "Jumped a ship, bought hisself a lubber's shirt and breeches, an Indian's soft shoes, and's scared o' bumpin' into his shipmates." The stranger's wariness seemed to confirm the sea-captain's suspicion. But now as those lithe legs fairly skipped across the floor the sea-captain revised his opinion. The fellow had sailed before the mast, sure enough, but not inside the last twelvemonth. The knees of his breeches swished a little too close to each other, and neither his battered hands nor his long curly hair showed traces of tar. From his belt hung a stiff scabbard of alligator hide, but the weapon it sheathed was no sword. It had the shape of the broad, heavy knife used on the sugar islands. The stranger sat down at a table but almost at once pushed back his chair and strode into the scullery. There was an exchange of words.

In a moment the innkeeper appeared with the pot of coffee and came across the room to the captain's table. "Here ye be, pipin' hot."

The captain had had a full crew on tying up at the waterfront, but several ships had come and gone since then. He might have need of hands. "Who be him that's up adoin' afore day?"

"Come in yesteday at noon. Name's Axford, so he says."

"And what ye know about him? A seaman?"

"Nary a seaman. Rides into Boston on a horse as spent as ye ever seen, they says. No sooner he comes—all a tatters, he

was—than he's askin' questions like he was the gov'nor hisself. Barters his horse, an' comes in here with them new breeches fer the night. An' now he's off fer New Hampshire —up the coast a ways."

"And what's he up to in the galley?"

"A-fixin' hisself provisions fer the trail. He's a restless man what's. . . ."

In the scullery Gilbert placed a wedge of cheese and a loaf of bread on a square cloth. He caught up the corners and knotted them together. In his eagerness to be on his way he might have forgotten to eat if the smell of coffee was not so strong. He ladled cold beans onto a plate, carried his breakfast to the dining room, and began eating. The innkeeper poured him a cup of coffee. Soon Gilbert paid him, picked up his bundle of food, and went out into the dark street. He turned north at the first intersection, following the innkeeper's directions until he became confused by the wandering streets. A few lamps burned in upstairs windows, but no journeymen were yet astir in the town. He found shipyards at the northern end of the peninsula, and a watchman directed him to the wherryman's house. In another hour, after helping to row the boat across the basin, he stepped ashore on the mainland. The road at first led between grain and hay fields, then through pastures. By dawn the farms lay behind him, a forest of hardwoods on either side. The road would lead him far. When it ended he would strike directly through the woods.

"'Bout eighty, ninety mile," a farmer told him. "Three, four days." Gilbert was sure he could reach Cocheco in two.

He was tempted to leave the winding road and thus shorten the distance, but one of the rivers, the Merrimac, was said to be wide; and so he jogged along the road, walking and running, his lungs heaving, his heart pounding, his stomach tightening—but not so much from exertion or hunger as from emotion.

Yesterday while galloping up the neck of land toward Boston he had not felt quite like this. Then his joyous expectation of finding her had been tempered with uncertainty; but today his emotions were boundless. Yesterday he had not even been sure that she lived. There had been no proof, only the feeling within him. Today he knew. There was to be no bitterness, no hideous bludgeon of despair to crush him forever with one dreaded blow.

Saints! To think of the future! William of Orange on the throne! They might even return to England now if they wished. All would be different.

The prospect was too happy to dwell upon, and he tried to remember what England looked like in the summer. He found himself unable to concentrate on the past. The immediate future obliterated all but the excitement of the heady present.

Crossing a low bridge over a brook, he stepped inadvertently into a space between two cross logs that peeled his stocking up to his knee and shaved the brown skin from his leg. He felt the pain, wondered at his capacity to feel it, and laughed at himself. The cool mothering of the water on his foot reminded him that his throat was dry. He jumped into the brook and drank out of his cupped hands as he waded across. How sweet the water! How green the trees! What a beautiful land!

But he could not thus quiet his excitement for longer than a minute at a time. How he was elated with his speed now angry with the contortions of the road. He wanted to run all the way to Cocheco, to race his unrestrained thoughts, to overtake them and be there already.

Two days? Could he do it in less? If he let his legs go as they wished. . . . But no. He had learned not to expend his legs. They were only flesh and bone like the legs of that last poor horse.

What will she be like? Changed? Older, of course. Three

and a half years older. But changed? Before God, if they've treated her ill . . . He quickened and lengthened his strides.

For some miles he worried about her welfare. Often on the sands of a Florida key, on the rocks of southern beaches, he had gritted his teeth in helpless anger, knowing that she, a lady of birth, must bear the lot of a bondwoman. And now he thought of her small hands, her delicate fingers, her smooth palms. They would be larger now, those hands, coarse and thick like the hands of a scullion.

Chapter 13

HER HANDS were indeed rough, far rougher than Gilbert imagined. Plying the awl, forcing its dulled point through the leather, her palm had no need of a glove. The callous at the base of her middle finger was hard enough. Nevertheless the old leather, a scrap from Major Waldron's discarded moccasins, was not easy to puncture with a dull awl, and so Wilhelmina dropped her work for a moment and crossed the kitchen to whet the tool on a hearthstone.

At the scratching sound Penitence looked up from her mending. "Can't ye be quiet nohow?" she complained shrilly. "Between that brat and yerself a body don't get no peace. What ye doin' with that awl?"

"Needs sharpening."

"Don't ye dare put me off! Ye know hearty well what I mean. Them old moccasins—what ye up to?" She nodded at the scraps of leather on Wilhelmina's couch.

"Tomorrow is Jem's birthday." Glancing out the window she saw him drinking at the well. One of the soldiers, stripped to the waist on this hottest day of late June, was holding the brimming pail. The men were beginning to like the boy. And no wonder! Standing there in his bare feet, he was wiping his mouth on his arm exactly as the men so often did. Admiring her son, Wilhelmina forgot Penitence until the strident voice resumed:

"Birthday? Need ye remind me? Me? Me who fetched ye both from near death's door? But it don't answer my question none. What ye doin' with them scraps o' leather?"

Wilhelmina hurried toward the couch. If Jem's moccasins were to be ready for his birthday she must not waste a spare moment. Appeasing Penitence with an explanation, she began punching holes along the edge of the toe-piece. Her hands were awkward. The small moccasins would be crude in comparison with those made by the squaws. Realizing how ill they might fit Jem's small feet, she felt the stings of incompetence and poverty. The pleasure of making the moccasins herself turned into pity for Jem who must wear clothing made from cast-off rags. "Never mind," she thought in deliberate words as was her habit when emotion raced out of hand. "Never mind. If William of Orange remembers the seal he will send for us. And Jem will dress in velvet. Roebury is rightly mine—and one day may be his."

Her work on the moccasins was interrupted by other duties—the preparation of the evening meal, the washing of dishes and pots, the milking of cows. Although twilight still lingered over the enclosure, Jem was sleeping in his basket when she picked up two buckets and went to the well. While drawing water she heard a commotion at the gate. The soldiers were about to close it, but two squaws, the first she had seen in weeks, were making signs and remonstrating in their harsh tongue. Although the sentries understood no more Abenaki than Wilhelmina, none could misunderstand

the squaws' request. They wanted shelter for the night. One of the men was for barring the gate, but the other was for letting them enter. He prevailed, and the women strolled in, heading directly for the barn. They would pass close by the well.

Wilhelmina stooped for the buckets. She was about to start for the kitchen when sudden recognition made her stare at the older squaw, the same one who had frightened her in the cow barn and later attended her when Jem was born. Although the squaw's face had been darkened by additional years of smoke and sun, there was no mistaking either the flashing smile of those strong teeth or the grey scar cutting the wrinkles of her cheek. She was Ah-tum-e-gun, daughter of a Saco chief but now the squaw of some Malisete brave in French Acadia. Or so Penitence had said three years ago.

Displaying her beautiful teeth, Ah-tum-e-gun halted. "Wa-wil-om-wal *Kwai!*" A sputter of harsher yet meaningless phrases raced after her greeting.

Wilhelmina acknowledged them as best she could, returning the smile and shaking her head at the storm of words. She wanted to thank Ah-tum-e-gun, to take her hand and lead her into the kitchen where Jem was sleeping, but something in the squaw's eyes recalled Penitence's warning. All Indians were unpredictable, treacherous. They might befriend you on one occasion and strangle you on the next. Wilhelmina hesitated, searching the squaw's black eyes, thinking they narrowed. Ah-tume-e-gun's broad smile failed to reassure her. Too often had Penitence repeated her tales of Indian guile.

And yet Wilhelmina could not but regret her coolness after the squaws departed for the barn. Somehow her distrust seemed unfair. Carrying the water across the yard, she remembered that Jem might have died before birth if the squaw had not caught her at the foot of the ladder. How ungrateful she was! But there was tomorrow. She would show

Jem to the squaw tomorrow. Easier of conscience, she entered the kitchen and set the buckets on the water stand.

Jem was still asleep. The lamp was smoking. She turned it low, moved it so that her face was in shadow, and sat down on the couch. No sooner had she resumed work on the moccasins than she thought how skillfully the squaws might have finished them if she had only been friendly. The thought preyed upon her. Presently she glanced out the window. Except for the dim moonlight the enclosure was dark and forbidding. But why be afraid? Why not invite the squaws? A cup of tea for them tonight, a pair of moccasins for Jem tomorrow.

She went outside, but in the darkness of the yard her uneasiness returned. She paused, remembering her first experience with Ah-tum-e-gun, her great fear at that time, and her promise to bring rum to the barn. Ah-tum-e-gun had waited an age, had waited until Major Waldron had discovered her and had had her whipped. Perhaps the squaw remembered. And yet pregnant herself, she had been kind when Jem was born.

Undecided, Wilhelmina turned now toward the barn, now toward the kitchen, the only lighted room in the sprawling garrison house. The soldiers were abed. Or were some of them, unable to sleep on so warm a night, still taking the air on the bench by the wall? She peered in that direction. There was none on the bench, but a dull thud near the gate caused her to listen intently. The sound was familiar. Where had she heard that thud before?

Suddenly she remembered. It was the sound of the oak bar falling to the hard earth at the foot of the gate. And then terror came. Even before she made out the vague figures of the squaws, she knew what would befall Cocheco. Yet for an instant she could only watch the gate swing open, the squaws stand aside, the gap in the stockade choke with milling bodies. Stealthily, so silently that their motion seemed a trick

of the eyes, they poured into the enclosure and merged with the shadows of the stockade and garrison house. Perhaps she screamed then, perhaps revealed herself in moonlight as she ran. Whatever the cause, all the icy gales of a hundred winters shrieked at once in her ears as she ran toward the lighted kitchen where Jem had been sleeping. Inside, she barred the door with fumbling hands.

Small arms clutched her leg. Snatching Jem up, she was aware of his mouth opening and closing, of her own effort to speak and make him understand that he must hide under the couch. But neither his cries nor her words were audible above the pounding of musket butts or stone clubs on the door. She ran to the couch, pushed him beneath it, draped a blanket over its edge.

"Hide, Jemmy! Stay here!" Astonished by the loudness of her voice, she realized that the pounding at the door had ceased. Men's shouts and women's screams mingled with savage yells at the far end of the building, but their sharpness was deadened by the walls. A shriller cry came from the doorway of the adjacent room. Turning, she saw Penitence slamming the door. In white bedgown and cap the woman scuttled wildly about the kitchen, peering first out one window and then out the other, all the while shrieking that the Indians were attacking. A window pane shattered as she looked out. Clawing at her face, Penitence slumped to the floor.

Wilhelmina did not run to the woman's side. Instead she seized the tongs from the hearth and leaped to the broken window. A painted head, bald except for a top-knot of black hair decorated with two eagle feathers, protruded into the room. It vanished as she raised the tongs, but presently the second window crashed inward. She had a glimpse of an egg-shaped stone in a net at the end of a handle. Raising the tongs, she rushed to that window, but the club withdrew. It reappeared at the first window. The Indian's shoulders and

arms, smeared with the same red and black paints that covered his face, were wriggling over the sill before she leaped within striking distance. Perhaps he would have fought back if Penitence, rising to her knees in spite of her bleeding face, had not grasped his club with both hands, but as it was, he lurched out of sight, leaving his weapon to Penitence. They saw no more of him, but the threat of his reappearance kept them on guard, and they flattened against the wall, their weapons poised above the windows.

Wilhelmina heard a musket shot. In her panic of those last minutes she had been vaguely conscious of sporadic firing, but the noise had seemed distant, like the reports of hunters in the hills. Now she realized that the shots had been muffled by the log walls. She listened for another, but none cracked above the whooping that became suddenly louder as savages poured into the adjacent room.

Hazily she was aware that Penitence was on her knees, her eyes turned up to the ceiling, her hands flattened together. She was aware, too, that the door of the next room was bursting open, but most of her attention was fixed on the boy clinging to her skirt. Unseen until now, Jem had crawled out from under the couch. Too late she thought of hiding him. He was scarcely in her arms when the yelling savages backed into the kitchen. Armed with clubs and hatchets, they were retreating before an onslaught led by Major Waldron. Or so Wilhelmina thought at first until with a mighty slash of his sword the old man drove all five savages back a pace. At once it was apparent that single-handed he had driven his adversaries from room to room. But he was near exhaustion. With each thrust of his sword a grunt escaped his lungs. With each gasp for breath his throat wheezed. His bedgown, torn from both shoulders, flapped from his arms and waist. And yet he seemed determined to drive the Indians across the kitchen and out-of-doors. Had the kitchen been a narrow corridor he might have succeeded, but here the Indians

had the advantage. As might a pack of snapping dogs they kept just out of reach, fanning out so as to strike him from the flanks should he advance from the bedroom doorway.

With Jem in her arms Wilhelmina could only cringe against the wall. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the outside door burst inward. A file of Indians swarmed into the kitchen. Immediately the newcomers joined the attack, but so furious was Major Waldron's defense that none dared step within reach of his thrashing sword. Only when a hatchet flashed in the doorway behind him was there a sudden forward rush.

Reluctant to view a body hacked beyond recognition, Wilhelmina closed her eyes when the savages dragged Major Waldron to the center of the room. She opened them only when the struggling ceased. Major Waldron was far from dead. Surrounded by some eight or ten warriors, he was sitting upright in a chair, straining to break the leather thongs that bound his wrists. The Indians, talking loudly as if in disagreement, seemed oblivious of herself and Jem. Penitence must have fled through the open door, for her screams came from the compound. Contemplating escape in that direction, Wilhelmina relinquished the idea when the screaming woman was dragged by the hair across the threshold. Her captor jerked her to her feet and sent her sprawling toward the fireplace. Her head must have hit stone, for her screams ended abruptly. More Indians were crowding into the kitchen, blocking both doors. A chief, distinguished by the seven feathers hanging from his top-knot, waved them back from the center of the room. Like the others he wore only moccasins and a little apron. Wrinkles twitched under the scarlet paint on his face. He was old, so old that his voice cracked as he spoke—in English:

"Major Waldron," he began, drawing a steel knife from beneath his apron thong. "With this I, Kan-ka-magus, cross out my account." He slashed Major Waldron's naked breast

twice and stepped back, grinning with satisfaction as the blood formed a cross on the white skin before trickling down to his waist.

All too vividly Wilhelmina recalled that Major Waldron often failed to cross out an account in his ledger. He had cheated the Indians year after year, but now the accounts were to be settled in full. She shuddered as another man slipped close and cut another cross on that quivering white breast. This time the words were in the Abenaki tongue, but they meant the same: "With this I cross out my account." Over and over she heard those words, once again in English, again and again in Abenaki. Wilhelmina shut her eyes, but presently the sound of the meat block rolling across the floor caused her to look in spite of her dread. She clutched Jem tighter as they forcibly spread Major Waldron's fingers on the block. Kan-ka-magus, wielding a hatchet this time, was first in line. The hatchet came down with a thick thud. A finger parted from Major Waldron's hand, but although he winced and shut his eyes no gasp passed his lips.

"Now," Kan-wa-magus jeered. "Now will your fist weigh a pound.

Although Wilhelmina recalled how Major Waldron had always considered his fist a pound when weighing tobacco and sugar, she could only shudder as the Indians laughed. Because her arms were trembling she put Jem on the floor and held his hand. He whimpered, but she had no words of comfort to offer. Indeed it was with a great effort that she suppressed a compulsion to cry out against such cruelty. She closed her eyes and did not open them again until Jem's sobbing became a cry of fright.

A squaw had him by the arm. The squaw was smiling, displaying her strong white teeth, but the livid scar cutting across her wrinkles made the smile a hideous grin.

"Un-quus," she grunted softly, lifting the shrieking boy

into her arms. *"Un-quus."* It was as if she were happy to see him again, but it was more than that. Ah-tum-e-gun held him possessively, as if he were her own son. She scowled, whirled him out of his mother's reach, and snapped a disgruntled order at the braves when Wilhelmina intercepted her at the door and clung to Jem. As if the squaw were afraid of tearing the boy asunder she did not jerk him away. Instead she squalled heatedly at the inattentive Indians until one of them sprang to do her bidding, to drag Wilhelmina out of reach. Watching until the squaw vanished with Jem and then listening for his cries in the compound, Wilhelmina became aware of cords biting into her wrists, of a hard knee pressing in the hollow of her back, of a greasy arm encircling her legs. She struggled violently. The brave growled, recovered his balance, and drew a thong tight about her knees. In another instant her ankles were secured; and in the next she was doubled over his shoulder, her face against his back, her legs in his arms. The Indian was in a hurry. Her jolting head grew dizzy as he carried her outside and jogged into the dazzling light. The outbuildings were mountains of flame. The compound was red and black, red with dancing light, black with dancing shadows. Heat slapped her cheeks. Noise, the shrieking of savages and the hissing of fire, roared in her ears. She must have fainted then, for the next sensation was that of pain. Her head ached, and her extremities throbbed for want of circulation, but these seemed mere discomforts as she tried to ease the agony in her shoulders. Reason told her that the Indian had thrown her down upon her arms which had taken the full brunt of her fall. And then she remembered Jem, forgot her physical agony, and died a hundred times of mental anguish.

Where was he? What were they doing to Jem? All night, while the flames destroyed Cocheco, while she struggled with her bonds, uncertainty tortured her mind as she watched

the frenzied Indians and listened for Jem's voice. But not until dawn when Cocheco was five low ridges of smoking ruins did she hear his feeble cry rising above the subsiding clamor.

Chapter 14

THE SKY was red in the east where the sun must soon rise. Freed at last from the bonds that had bound her, Wilhelmina rubbed her swollen ankles. A disarray of plunder—kettles, blankets, bolts of cloth, several kegs, and atop a pile of clothing two hind quarters of warm beef—cluttered the grass around her. Similar collections were everywhere. Over each of them a group of Indians hovered busily. The war party was preparing to leave.

Jem was tethered to a musket driven into the field some fifty paces nearer the water. The hemp rope attached to his wrist was taut, but he had not seen her yet. Near him the squaw, Ah-tum-e-gun, was knotting the ropes of a huge bundle. Three braves, one prone on the ground, another kicking him awake, and the third stuffing clothing into a bag seemed to form that particular party.

Wilhelmina ached in every limb as she ran toward them. She thought an Indian yelled behind her, but there were so many shouts from every direction that she was unsure until the hand in her hair brought her to a painful halt. She fell to one knee only, and rising, faced the savage. Sweat had washed the paint from his face, but like all faces, those of captives and captors alike, it was grimy with smoke. Yet

she recognized his eyes at once, and somehow they reminded her of Silas Vetch, officer of the Lambs in England. The dark irises were somewhat less black than his pupils and they were set unusually close together as if they were burrowing into the sides of his nose. Young and strong, the teeth between his smiling lips were as yellow and as even as a row of parched corn. He was the same Indian who had captured her last night, but the little apron he had worn was missing. He had improvised another apron from a small piece of blanket cloth that exposed a blistered thigh as if he had been severely burned or scalded below the waist.

Hand knotted in her hair, he jerked her toward his companions. Surmising that he would bind her on further provocation, she went submissively. Minutes later he tossed her a moccasin, then another. Soon another Indian, one who evidently had been too drunk to help with the packing, staggered from the direction of the river. He was the same brave who, like Kan-ka-magus, had taunted Major Waldron in English.

Already a few Indians and captives, their bodies leaning forward from their waists to counterbalance the enormous burdens on their backs, were tramping by. She looked and found that Ah-tum-e-gun's men were adjusting packs. They would be among the first to go. The squaw's head was hidden by the towering load on her back. She reached for the musket, pulled its barrel out of the earth and started off after the braves. Jem followed behind her like a pup at the end of a leash.

Wilhelmina ran to him. "Jem!" she cried, pulling the gold chain down over his head. "Wear this always!" She had little hope that he would retain it long, but a little hope was a thing to cherish. "Keep it, Jem—and when you grow big you will go to England! Give it to the king! The king! This seal! Jem, do you understand?"

He was bewildered but there was no time to explain the

significance of his grandmother's seal. She could only hope that through the years to come he would remember her words and one day understand. If not he would be a savage always. But he would live. Yes, this squaw, slackening the rope and coming back with anger blanching the scar on her face, was like a she-bear. She would protect her cub as best she knew.

Not until her captor, after forcing her to return, placed a leaden bale on her back did she understand why he spared her a beating. The weight of the bale was punishment enough. The rope straps cut into her forehead and shoulders.

The foremost Indians had already entered the woods, but most of them were still in the field, walking in single file. In all, allowing for those out of sight, there were some twenty-odd captives, about ten squaws, and nearly threescore braves. One by one they vanished into the forest.

She hurried to overtake Jem, passed two braves in the oat field, a squaw and a brave in the pasture, but although she caught up to a fifth Indian on the narrow patch she could not pass him. Boughs tore at her pack. Humps and hollows jolted her from heel to forehead. Switches, bent and released by the plodding brave, sprang back to lash her face. She tired, fell behind, was alone for a minute, and then was harassed and tormented from behind. Within an hour she made a halt, rested her pack upon a windfall, and let several braves file by. Her captor came up, cut a switch from a beech tree, and drove her on.

The path wound northward. A hunter's path at first, it dwindled to a game trail, dividing and subdividing. Now and again the Cocheco River gleamed on the left, but toward noon she saw it for the last time as the long file of Indians and captives struck directly through a dense pine forest. Here the way was marked only by the odds and ends of discarded plunder and the narrow line of scuffed pine needles. At mid-afternoon the procession swung to the right and

skirted a rivulet overhung with alders. To Wilhelmina the trek seemed endless. Her hands dropped the packages incessantly. On such innumerable occasions the beech switch curled around her pack to sting her arms, but never once did Sik-spoo lash at her swelling ankles. She was a pack-mule, a useful beast not to be crippled wantonly. When she fell he glowered, cursed in his harsh language, but frustrated by her helplessness, refrained from switching at her face. He was too tired. After helping her to stand, he kicked the packages out of her path and urged her forward. She wedged her hands under the ropes that had scalded her forehead, and trudged on. An hour later they came up with the halted leaders.

The sight of birch bark canoes half concealed in the bushes fringing a pond was a welcome one to Wilhelmina. With some hearsay knowledge of their ways, she knew that the rest of the journey would be by water, that from this pond the Indians had launched their campaign against Cocheco.

Painfully she squirmed out of the ropes and tried to arch her stiff back. Vaguely she knew that she was expected to prepare the evening meal, but she slipped off unnoticed, moving among the Indians until she spied Ah-tum-e-gun bending over a fire. Jem was asleep on a blanket. Wilhelmina examined his ankles and soles. She gladdened as she realized that the squaw had carried him most of the way. Exhausted as well he might be, he was in better hands than hers. She could never have carried him along with the pack. And wonders of wonders! The gold chain was still about his neck. Turning to the frowning squaw, Wilhelmina smiled.

"Oh thank you, Ah-tum-e-gun. Thank you."

The squaw glared, ordered her off with strange but eloquent threats. Wilhelmina discreetly stood back, but she lingered near to scan the four braves lounging near Ah-tum-e-gun's fire. She memorized the faces, noting the exceedingly high cheekbones of one, the peculiar curl of another's right

ear, the ugly raw wound in the third brave's knee, the exceptionally flat nose of the fourth. She studied the canoe also, particularly the device painted on the bark—two men poling a canoe in the wake of a swimming muskrat. She fixed the picture in her mind and looked again. This canoe seemed oddly constructed. Yes, in one respect it was different from the others; each end, instead of being open between the gunwales, was decked to shed rain; the decks extended a few inches over the sides as if to ward off the splashes or rough waters. Thoughtfully making her way back to her captor's fire, she drew an unwelcome conclusion: Ah-tum-e-gun and her captor, Sik-spoo, belonged to different tribes. Yes, now she remembered. Ah-tum-e-gun had married into some northern tribe dwelling in Acadia. What was it Penitence had said? The Malisete tribe on the Saint John River, the most distant of all the Abenaki tribes. And Sik-spoo? What was his tribe? Where was he taking her? She asked Wal-ko-kee, the English-speaking Indian.

He pointed a rib of beef toward the northern end of the pond, swallowed his bite and answered:

"Sik-spoo, he and me Penobscot band. We go many days. Ah-tum-e-gun, he Wool-us-took band. He go much many days."

"Wool-us-took band? You mean, Malisetes?"

"You make good talk much quick. You make good squaw—too."

"Too?" Stressed at the end of this observation that one word puzzled her. "Too?"

"My mother, he Yengee woman."

Wilhelmina had wondered how Mal-ko-kee, living as he did in Acadia, had learned English. "Your mother was an Englishwoman, a captive like me?"

"Yes. He good squaw."

"But you—you don't look like a half-breed. Your scalplock—black."

He laughed, plucked a rib of beef from the pot, handed it to her, and regarded her out of gleaming black eyes. "Your hair black too," he remarked and then spoke to Sik-spoo at some length, accompanying his words with gestures and once pointing to Wilhelmina and himself.

Sik-spoo's frown became a scowl. He spoke heatedly and shook his head. Thereafter Mal-ko-kee fell to brooding silence. His conversation with Wilhelmina was resumed neither during the meal nor afterwards. Exhausted, she was glad of the silence. Leaning her back against the pine she had all she could do to tear the meat from the rib. She fell asleep on the fallen needles between the toes of the pine. She woke in the dead of night, not to pull up the blanket that someone had tossed to her feet but to steal quietly among the Indians. None was awake. Even Ah-tum-e-gun seemed fast asleep. Wilhelmina lay down on the blanket beside Jem and cuddled him in her arms. Presently she was asleep again.

Chapter 15

DAWN CAME steaming over the pond. Kan-ka-magus gave the word to launch the birch bark canoes, and soon the entire party was paddling upstream. Each day took them farther into the wilderness, but the Indians were in no hurry. Good hunting detained them. Poor hunting drove them on.

In despair Wilhelmina made little effort to remember landmarks during the first few weeks. She knew hazily that they left the watershed and travelled west, then north. It was

not until the party made camp on a branch of the Saco River that hope of escape came to her and prompted questions.

"Where are we, Mal-ko-kee? How far is it down to Saco, the English village?"

But Mal-ko-kee would not tell her. "You no go," he advised omnisciently. "Big falls on Sa-kok." Yet he regarded her oddly and at great length as though he might like to help her if he could.

She was tempted to confide, no, to admit her wish to escape. The prospect of engaging him to guide her down to the settlement intrigued her during the meal; but later, noticing the stiffness of his little apron, she abandoned the idea and thereafter avoided him except when the others were at hand.

The Indians were erecting wigwams. Was it evidence of a sojourn? The sky was cloudy, presaging rain. When the work of cutting poles, brush, and bark was done she found Jem tethered to a rock, and consoled him with assurances that she would come every night. "And don't be afraid of Ah-tum-e-gun, Jemmy. Ah-tum-e-gun loves you too."

"She smells bad."

"Yes, Jemmy. But you musn't mind that." Thinking of the braves, especially Sik-spoo who stank even on the open river, she sympathized with Jem. She brushed a mosquito from the back of his hand. "Are the flies bothering you?"

In spite of the smoke from the fires his brown face and neck were stippled with red bites. She drew Ah-tum-e-gun's attention to them, and the squaw immediately plastered him with bear grease.

Ah-tum-e-gun began to trust her, even to the point of overlooking her frequent visits to the Malisete wigwam during that week of grey weather. Wilhelmina tried to spend all her time with Jem, but her rancid smelling captor insisted that she tend the cooking even though he grumbled at her exceptionally smoky fire. Although he still permitted her to sleep in Ah-tum-e-gun's wigwam, he took to beating her for

misunderstanding his orders. She did her best, but the complex language led her into error. She was always relieved whenever he shouldered his old muzzleloader and went hunting, which he did more and more as his burn healed.

"What does his name mean?" she asked Mal-ko-kee who seldom hunted. Indeed he seldom did anything except when the braves shamed him into action.

"Sik-spoo? He died from breathing a bad stink."

"Died?"

"His father. His father, he smell him and die." Mal-ko-kee laughed and added: "Now he not smell much—he lose old apron—burn up."

She was glad Sik-spoo was thus disabled, but the thought was revolting, and so she asked: "And your name, Mal-ko-kee?"

His smile of amusement turned to childish shame. She did not learn the meaning of the word until several days later when Sik-spoo caught her pondering absently while the fire under the pot died low.

"*Mal-ko-kee,*" he raged, cuffing her head and pointing at the embers. "*Mal-ko-kee!*" He shook her by the hair and cuffed her again. "*Mal-ko-kee!*"

She knew then what Mal-ko-kee meant in English: Lazy One.

A week of intermittent rain swelled the river almost to the doors of the wigwams. One evening when the sky promised a fair morrow. Wilhelmina walked to the point and stared at the merging tributaries and the main flood sweeping down toward the sea. If she were to steal a canoe at midnight, she reasoned, the turbulent waters might carry her and Jem far out of Sik-spoo's reach before he missed them in the morning. But the falls! To drift down upon the falls! Oh, if she only knew these rivers!

A puff of tobacco smoke caught her eye. Looking toward the bank, she saw old Kan-ka-magus sitting on a rock and

brooding over a pipe. He was so still that at first she thought he did not see her. Grave now instead of fierce, his recessed eyes stared at the flowing river as if he were reading an interminable belt of wampum. And yet he must have been watching her, for he shook his head and answered the question in her mind:

"It is not wise you steal canoe. No, Wa-wil-om-wa, it is not wise. Your boy, he is safe in the forest. In Saco down there he will have no Ah-tum-e-gun." His stoic face registered no amusement, though he could not help but see the consternation in her eyes. "Little boy, he die in Saco."

"Why? Is Saco to be attacked too?"

"All these Yengee forts—all." He swept his hand toward the coast as if to include every settlement this side of Boston. Though his croaking voice was calm it betrayed a hidden emotion, anger perhaps, or anticipated vengeance. He was like a great backwater behind a dam, placid, but ready to surge forth in wild fury when the retaining wall collapsed. Already the dam was leaking ominously. He seemed to take satisfaction in foretelling the fate of her people: "All the tribes of the east gather together. And soon—war! Not this time we die one tribe at a time. This time all Abenaki tribes one tribe. This time the French come down from Canada. We all one. We attack. They die like flies, the Yengees."

Wilhelmina was impressed as much by his revelation as by his knowledge of her intentions. She realized that escape was hopeless. Jem was safer in a wigwam than in a garrison house. And yet, if the chief's prediction became a reality, could she ever hope to find her way back to an English settlement? If the French and Indians destroyed Saco, Salmon Falls, the other settlements—where could she go? Must she remain forever in the wigwams? Must Jem become a savage like Mal-ko-kee? No. She bit hard, gritting her teeth with determination. If she could hope to make her way back to Saco she could hope to go all the way to Boston. And she

would. Some day when Jem's legs were strong enough to endure the long journey she would return from the Saint John River in remote Acadia.

An ironic laugh disturbed her thoughts. Kan-ka-magus was walking away. She felt suddenly insignificant, helpless, incompetent. And then she was crying, kneeling on the beach and sobbing into her hair.

The journey continued day after day. The flotilla, diminishing in numbers at every Indian village, became four canoes only, then three, then two—the Penobscot and the Malisete. They proceeded north and east to a vast jagged lake surrounded by mountains. Its northern arm took them near the headwaters of another river.

Wilhelmina trembled when she heard the river's name, Penobscot. To the Indians it meant Rock-sloping-down, but to her it meant that soon, as soon as Sik-spoo reached his tribal hunting grounds, Ah-tum-e-gun and Jem would proceed without her. Other fears beset her again, for Sik-spoo's burns were healing quickly, but the prospect of final separation from Jem preyed on her day and night.

As they paddled down the Penobscot she kept her eye on the mountain off to the left. It seemed to shift rapidly against the sky, though always it was there, Ka-tah-din, they called it. Now more conversant with the roots of Abenaki words, she translated the mountain's name without Mal-ko-kee's help. "*Kata*, lofty," she told him. "*Ahdin*, mountain." It was poor consolation to display her progress in the language, but it was one means of diversion. And she needed diversion from the thought of what lay ahead. She prayed that there might always be another lake to retard their progress, but finally Mal-ko-kee pointed back over his shoulder and shook his head:

"Last lake. Now we go five, six mile. Come to river flowing in from north. Sik-spoo go up. Take Wa-wil-om-wa. Mal-ko-kee go down—two day down—to Ka-dis-ik."

She had no interested in Mal-ko-kee's destination. "Where do Ah-tum-e-gun and Jem go?"

"Ten, twelve mile down Penobscot. Then he go up Mattawamkeag."

"Mattawamkeag?" She asked eager questions and learned that the river flowed out of the north-east. Ah-tum-e-gun would ascend its entire length, portage to the Lake-of-Eels, and descend the River-of-Eels.

"Is the portage well marked?"

"It much old war trail."

"Will Ah-tum-e-gun go down the River-of-Eels?"

"Yes. He go down to Wool-us-took."

"The Beautiful River?"

"Yes. The good, good river."

"What village? Where will she go?"

"Meductic."

She memorized the names of the waterways leading to Meductic. Her hopes were weak, but with luck she might one day have need of the knowledge. A successful journey to Meductic would require physical stamina, much skill in woodcraft, and luck. She had the stamina. She had the skill. But the luck?

Surely within a year or two. . . . Her thought was incomplete when another took its place. What had Sik-spoo in mind? The question alarmed her, occupied her until they reached the juncture of the twin branches.

The Penobscots beached their canoe at the forks. Ah-tum-e-gun. Jem, and the fourth Malisetes passed by in the other canoe. An exchange of farewells echoed over the water. The child, perhaps because he expected his mother to overtake him as she always did, made no protest. He looked back once, but a startled flock of ducks distracted him, and he turned downstream to watch them rise from the water. It was almost as if he did not care whether she followed or not.

To Wilhelmina, stifling her tears in fear of a beating from

Sik-spoo, it seemed an eternity before the Malisete canoe drifted out of sight. Jem did not look back again. Staring at the place where he had vanished, she trembled with the realization that he was beginning to like Ah-tum-e-gun and to admire the Malisete braves, especially his stepfather, Ka-ka-kos.

She wiped the tears from her eyes and stared at the place where he had vanished. He was really gone. Sorrow overcame her now, and she burst into tears. If Sik-spoo kicked her then, she would never know it until the discolorations of her skin gave evidence.

When at last she was aware of the Penobscots they were sorting the cargo, leaving the bulk of it in the canoe, placing Sik-spoo's belongings ashore. Three men took positions in the canoe and let the current bear them away.

Sik-spoo gave her a cuff and pointed toward a cedar on the bank. *"Losa ni,"* he ordered. *"Hu-kwe-tun."*

She climbed the bank, searched awhile, found his birch bark canoe, carried it across the beach, and set it in the water. Sik-spoo gave no praise either while she poled during that morning or while she built the wigwam that afternoon. It was expected of her. But he did tell her that here at the mouth of this brook they would spend a moon before ascending to the winter hunting grounds. Indeed as he ate most of the duck he was patient with her to the point of repeating his words and explaining them with gestures when she did not understand. Presently he left her alone in the wigwam.

In spite of her hunger she had no stomach for the remnant of the duck. Nothing might happen tonight, but sooner or later there would come the moment. The smell of his body still lingered in the wigwam, although he had sat cross-legged here only briefly. Through the doorway she glanced at the river and saw him kneeling on a rock, a fish spear in his upraised hand. She hoped he would fall in the water and thus

bathe a month of sweat and filth from his body. She had never seen him in the water.

His musket hung from one pole of the wigwam. She took it down. It was an old muzzleloader. Had he loaded it after shooting the duck? No, he had leaned it against the thwart. She distinctly remembered that.

He was motionless on the rock.

She examined the flint, cocked it, pulled the trigger. A spark flew as the flint struck the steel. She cocked it again. Resting the heavy barrel on the firewood, she squinted along its length at Sik-spoo and pulled the trigger. The click and spark made her blink. Frightened she hung the musket on the wigwam pole.

His spear plunged deep. Grasping it now with both hands, he lifted a thrashing salmon above the surface. When the spear pointed at the sky the silver fish slid down the shaft to his shoulder. As he leaped shoreward from rock to rock she thought the blood of the fish would smear his shoulder until the next rain. He dropped the salmon on the beach and beckoned. The scaling and cleaning remained to her.

While cleaning the fish on the beach she felt Sik-spoo's eyes upon her rather than on the water beneath his spear. He was silent on the rock, but he seemed to be shouting: "Tonight! Tonight!" She glanced up and saw him grinning, his yellow teeth dull in the twilight, his close-set eyes black as powder. It would be tonight. Even at that distance she knew by the look of him that it would be tonight.

Picking up the pot of fish, she realized that he would follow at once if she returned to the wigwam. But no, he was listening to some noises across the river. She thought she heard the sounds too—a thud like the tramp of a hoof on a sodden log and the snap of a dry spruce branch. Another snap and then crashing.

Sik-spoo cupped his hands and hissed at her: *"Pask-higan!"*

She set the pot down quietly, stole up to the wigwam, returned with the musket and powder horn, and stealthily waded out to the rock.

"*Moz,*" he whispered in excitement.

The moose, apparently looking for a place to plunge down the steep bank, was still hidden among the hemlocks and spruces across the river. Like a rock in the stream she crouched low, watching how Sik-spoo knelt and sprinkled powder on the musket's flash pan. Obviously he thought the muzzle was loaded with powder and ball. He cocked the flint.

There was a cracking of brush and then a rolling of stones as the bull moose plunged down to the beach. It waded out and drank, looking up now and then in the gathering dusk and dripping water from its bell. It was a long shot, and Sik-spoo was waiting for the bull to present a larger target by turning sideways. But the bull did not turn to splash ashore. He came on, lurching deeper and deeper, and at last swam, drifting downstream at an angle. His hoofs were touching bottom when Sik-spoo rose to aim at the great forequarters lunging out of water.

He pulled the trigger. The result was an explosion. The moose sagged in the water, regained his legs, and surged out of the shallows to leave a wet path on the beach as it vanished into the woods below the wigwam.

The explosion shocked Wilhelmina. Afraid that her facial expression might betray her thought, she turned and waded ashore. The musket had been loaded after all. At some moment after shooting the duck. . . . Yes, while she had gone for birch bark Sik-spoo must have charged the muzzle.

She hoped now that he would follow the moose, but the hope was a faint one. The Indians seldom pursued a wounded animal at once, for thus it would be driven farther from camp. They preferred to wait until it died. Moreover, a wounded bull was a dangerous beast. Watching Sik-spoo examine the wet trail on the beach, she was about to conclude

that he would not follow the moose into the forest until morning, but her hope revived when he climbed the bank where it had disappeared. She saw the boughs closing behind him.

To ready the canoe would take only a moment. What else would she need? A paddle for the swift trip downstream, a pole for the long push up the Mattawamkeag, a little corn for nourishment during the interval before overtaking Ah-tum-e-gun. But what then? The squaw might send her back. And surely Sik-spoo would follow, if not for his canoe then for revenge.

At another time she might have trembled to think how he would torture her, but the prospect of pain and death a week hence was less frightening than the prospect of spending the night with Sik-spoo, and so she did not tremble now. Instead she listened intently, hearing only silence. Had he gone after the moose? Or was he watching her?

She stared at the canoe awhile, picked up the knife and pot, and walked slowly toward the wigwam. Sik-spoo emerged from the bushes and stood on the bank.

Though he was at a distance it seemed that she could smell him already. She could not enter the wigwam where he would soon come. Instead she left the pot and knife near the doorway and returned to the beach. Sitting on a boulder, she stared down the river while bits of the red sky flecked the eddies like maple leaves in autumn.

There came the sound of gravel rolling down the bank. She cringed from the dreaded sound and knew that in spite of her determination to abide him she would run when at last he came. And now he was singing, wooing her as if he thought he would overcome her revulsion. Poor savage, he wanted more than he could take by force. He wanted her to give of herself as might an Indian maid. He would be angry when she ran, but now his song was sad: "Often you weep over the shining river; often you weep, Wa-wil-om-wa." To

Wilhelmina, translating the song, it was sad and it was true, and it was loathsome on his tongue. She covered her ears and screamed.

The singing ceased. Gravel crunched under moccasins, but Wilhelmina heard nothing except the beating of her pulse. She sensed rather than heard him approach, and sensing it she could not command her body. She leaped erect, glimpsed him close behind her, and ran into the water, splashing out to her waist, and wading to her shoulders.

If only she could swim! Under the trees on the farther side it was dark enough to hide her for awhile. She struck out and felt the water lapping over her head as she sank, and then felt it combing her hair flat against her face as she bobbed to the surface. Hair and splashes blinded her eyes. She caught a breath of spray. Thrashing the water in panic she fought to keep high above the surface, but the weight of head and shoulders plunged her down. The hair floated away from her eyes. Above her the surface was a shattering pane of stained glass, below her the river bed a mosaic floor of a hundred colours. Her foot kicked bottom, drove her up into the choking splashes caused by her flailing arms. Water enveloped her head again and swept the hair from her face.

A dark wavering body loomed off to the left. It was a naked man with his head cut off by the sheet of stained glass. He was crawling along on hands and knees, hovering in the air between her and the window pane. He was closer now. Her hand touched his knee, slipped down to his ankle. She seized it and held fast and wondered what it was and let it go and thought this was a strange dream.

She shook off the dream and revelled in a bed so soft that feathers seemed to engulf her whole body. Never was a bed so comfortable. She told Jem to run out and play in the garden, and Gilbert nodded, and then they laughed and the boy was gone. But Gilbert was so rough this time. It was as if he had been absent for years and years, and would never be

done even though she was exhausted and falling asleep.

It was like a dream now, a disturbing dream. He seemed so fierce, not like Gilbert at all. And the bed was not so soft. It was prickly against her bare stomach and cheek, but now the great weight was gone, and he was breathing hard, smelling of sweat as if he had just come in from his beloved turnip fields and had not bathed. She thought he smelled like an Indian, Indian? Yes, like an Indian. She had smelled Indians somewhere, some time. She tried to remember where she had smelled an Indian. Where? Where? It was all so long ago, so vague now, but the Indian had had a name, and she had been alone with him on the shore of some river, and had been afraid, terribly afraid, and had begun swimming across to the far side. But she could not swim. She never could swim. Perhaps the Indian had dragged her out. Sik-spoo, that was his name. He must have . . . Sik-spoo! This was not Gilbert. This perspiring man beside her was Sik-spoo. Abruptly her situation burst upon her consciousness. She stirred and coughed. Her chest was scalded as if from breathing steam, her stomach retched as if from drinking poison.

It was dark. She rolled over on her back. Stars circled dizzily beyond the vent at the peak of the wigwam. She rolled farther, struggled to her hands and knees and crawled outside. Halfway to the river she vomited and crawled over the vomit. Perhaps the stones hurt her knees and perhaps the night air chilled her skin, but if they did she was oblivious of the discomfort. She could think of nothing save the urge to wash herself in the river. She stood up only to reel dizzily and fall and bruise herself on the stones. She crawled to the water and into the water. The water was clean, clean. Later she found her torn, sodden, useless clothes. She wrung the water from her moccasins, set them to dry by the coals of the fire, took a blanket from the wigwam, climbed the bank, and slept under a hemlock until dawn.

Sik-spoo woke her with a shout. She came to his fire and

set the salmon to boil. After devouring his breakfast and smoking a pipe of tobacco, he gathered thongs and tarred ropes, tossed them to her, and beckoned.

"*Wi-ja-wig*," he said, shouldering his long musket and swinging down the beach.

She followed him to the bank where the moose had disappeared last night. The way led through dense evergreens at first, but presently the dark trees thinned. The bull had bled little. The tracks of his great cloven hoofs were difficult to tell from older tracks, and Sik-spoo paused frequently. Until they entered the bog, an expanse of low bushes and grasses with here and there an island of scrub spruces, their progress was slow. But in the bog the track was a distinct furrow in the grasses, and Sik-spoo paused no more. She fell behind, now wading ankle deep in water, now skirting a patch of dense bushes, now crossing a meadow. From near Sik-spoo a flock of ducks rose and wheeled low over the bog to settle down on another pond. Far in advance a great heron folded its long neck and flapped leisurely away. Sik-spoo began climbing a wooded knoll a hundred paces ahead of Wilhelmina.

A crashing of branches made her stop abruptly. She saw two scrub spruces bending in opposite directions like parting curtains. The moose burst into view and halted. It snorted, swinging its great head from side to side, and charged forward. As Sik-spoo aimed the musket Wilhelmina saw a puff of smoke but heard no report. The Indian lowered the musket, primed it with powder from the horn at his side, and raised it again. The bull was bearing down upon him, those knees lifting high, those antlers lowering. There was another soundless puff of smoke, and then Sik-spoo leaped aside. The bull lunged past him, turned, and hid him from Wilhelmina's view for a moment. And now the bull was stamping in a circle, revealing the Indian on the ground—a broken body that jerked about under pounding hoofs.

Wilhelmina shuddered at the sight and crouched low while the beast snorted and bellowed. Realizing that she could not hide, she fled to the nearest knoll. The spruces there were too small for climbing, but they offered concealment. She had a moment to catch her breath, and then, keeping the trees between her and the bull, ran into the bog. The blanket fell from her shoulders. Bushes lacerated her legs. Mud sucked at her feet. But she plunged on until the forest closed about her. Only then did she stop and hold her breath to listen. There was no sound. After regaining her breath she glanced at the sun and picked her way through the trees. She came out on the river bank and followed the beach to the wigwam.

An entire day had elapsed since the Malisetes and Jem had passed the mouth of this tributary, but they had been drifting. They would not have reached the Mattawamkeag in two hours, and there they would have paused to cook and bid farewell to the Penobscots. By dusk they would have camped three leagues or less up the Mattawamkeag, and by this hour in the morning they would scarcely have poled much farther upstream.

She turned the canoe upright and ran to the wigwam. A minute of rummaging in the bundles produced men's clothing. She drew on breeches and turned the waist down over a belt of rope.

Two days later when she overtook Ah-tum-e-gun's canoe at the falls on the River-of-Eels the four Malisete warriors were skeptical of her story told in a crippled Indian vocabulary. Miko the Squirrel and Kitchi-miko the Big Squirrel, decided to return to the Penobscot River and ascertain the cause of Sik-spoo's death if indeed he were dead.

The rest of the journey was no hardship for Wilhelmina. Although she carried a pack over numerous portages she rested during the equally numerous rides in the canoe. The pace was slow and effortless in comparison with her recent

hurry. Except for her worries she might have enjoyed herself, might have thought the song of the stream a lyric instead of a dirge. It was heartening to see the glow of health in Jem's fattening cheeks and body, disheartening to imagine those same cheecks daubed one day with war paint. It was encouraging to see him smile back at her, discouraging to see him admire Ka-ka-kos.

That evening when the party camped near the mouth of the River-of-Eels Wilhelmina looked at herself in the pool and trembled like her image. Except for her loose hair and her grey eyes she might have been an Indian. Wrinkles? Yes, on either side of her eyes several pale lines streaked the tanned skin. From squinting in the sun? She looked at Ah-tum-e-gun bending over the fire. The squaw was no older than her husband, twenty or twenty-five, but she looked sixty already. The grime of smoke and grease accentuated the black wrinkles in her face. Only the scar in her cheek was smooth.

The squaw lifted her gaze to the big rock where Ka-ka-kos and Jem were perched. The warrior's left arm was encircling the boy, his right pointing out over the trees to the eagle's nest in the pine. The squaw called:

"Tee-tees! Tee-tee-sis!"

Ka-ka-kos the Crow released Jem and let him scamper down the face of the sloping rock.

Tee-tees? Tee-tee-sis?

Bluejay. Little Bluejay.

Chapter 16

THE BROAD river that the Malisete canoe breasted on the following morning was rightly named Wool-us-took, the Beautiful River. Like a strip of morning sky it shone quietly in a green valley between ranges of low hills dabbed here and there with the first colours of a recent frost. The canoe swam as if on a lake. The green meadows and cornfields on the intervales and islands told of peace. But they lied. Wilhelmina knew they lied. For this, if all Mal-ko-kee had said was true, was to be the base of savage campaigns against New England. Here, according to Kan-ka-magus also, the warriors of all eastern tribes would muster before descending upon those who had gradually displaced the Abenakis from their homelands in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Here the few survivors of the once proud Pequods, their identities lost in the tribes of their adoption, would relate how the Yengees of Plymouth had all but exterminated their nation. Here the vengeful of the Pokumtoks and the Massachusetts, those who had survived the ravages of plague and musket, those who had never been tamed, those who had fled north to live with the Pennacooks, would speak at the council fires. They were all Abenakis now, men of the Land of Dawn. Once they had fought among themselves, Malisetes against Penobscots, the original Abenakis; Penobscots against Pennacooks, that great tribe of Wawenocks, Kennebecs, Androscoggins and Sacos; Pennacooks against Massachusetts; Massachusetts against Pokumtoks and Pequods. But now they were united in one great federation. Threatened by the English on the coast, threatened by the Iroquois on the west, they had no refuge but in the north and east. And so they would gather on this river, the Saint John of Acadia that rose in

the mountains south of the Saint Lawrence River, the Saint John whose current would bear supplies and allies from Quebec.

Suddenly Wilhelmina saw the fort. Built on high ground a short distance from the river, it looked quite like one of those erstwhile stockades at Cocheco except that smoking peaks of wigwams instead of stone chimneys rose above the pickets. Behind it stretched a field of ripening corn. In front of it stood a few scattered wigwams. Neither the fort nor the crowd of some hundred-odd savages who ran shouting to the beach was imposing. Only the numerous howling dogs impressed her. Indeed the excitment of the Indians at Meductic was much like that of the settlers at Cocheco when Major Waldron's sloop used to dock. Instead of English shouts she heard Indian greetings: *Kwee* and *Hawhaw* and *Nicobuk*.

Yet Wilhelmina was frightened. Now and again she caught a familiar phrase as Ka-ka-kos told them about the success of the expedition to Cocheco. She kept near Ah-tum-e-gun and Jem while the crowd pressed close with gestures and questions. She heard her own name linked with Sik-spoo's. There were angry cries, frightful grimaces. Several braves raised knives, stone clubs, and trade hatchets above their heads. She was under suspicion, and would remain so until Miko and Kitchi-miko paddled to the Penobscot and back, and then she would be a captive. Why not treat her as such? Why wait until Miko brought the news? Because, and Wilhelmina trembled as she heard Ka-ka-kos reply, because Sik-spoo might be alive, might want to punish his squaw himself.

It had been fortune, she now realized, that Sik-spoo had taken her unto himself and not to a Penobscot village. But now she was indeed a captive, a captive in a Malisete village. They would begin their fiendish dancing as soon as Miko could assure them that she was fair game and not the property of a friend.

Jem? She was glad he misunderstood, could tell his name

in English and Indian, could smile at the squaws who chucked him under the chin and cooed their baby-talk. An hour later, while she and Ah-tum-e-gun erected a wigwam near the stockade, she missed him, and scanning the beach, saw him among a group of small children who were tossing stones into the river. For an instant she was almost glad to see him enjoying himself. He had never had friends of his own age. But now? Look at him toss that corn-husk five times his own length!

And then the hopelessness of it overwhelmed her. Dimly through watering eyes she saw another group of boys farther down the beach. They had sling-sticks, yard-long sticks with thongs and loops attached, and were casting stones halfway across the river. All of the older boys were brown skinned, nearly naked, and black haired. Farther along the beach sat a score of men, some whetting knives and hatchets, others cleaning muskets, others merely smoking, but all listening to Jem's stepfather. Ka-ka-kos was telling of war. A stifling fear made her choke and burst into tears. Tee-tees. Bluejay. Some day they would call him Ka-ka-kos. Crow. Oh my Jemmy, my little Jem!

A blow between the shoulder blades sent her to her knees. She rose, picked up the awkward roll of spruce bark, and carried it to the wigwam site. Ah-tum-e-gun ordered her up the hill for more bark. She went docilely. The birches had long since been stripped for wigwams and canoes, and so she selected a great spruce, chopped a ring around the bole as high as she could reach, and another ring near the ground. After slitting the bark from one ring to the other, she pried with axe and hands until at last the broad slab lay on the ground. At dusk, after many trips, she was amazed to see that the slight framework of poles could bear the weight of so much heavy bark. There remained the mattresses. She gathered armloads of brush and covered the entire floor except for a circle in the centre where Ah-tum-e-gun built the fire that

was to burn or smolder as long as the wigwam was occupied. The smoke blackened the walls, but it kept the mosquitoes out.

A war-party of Malisetes came to double the population of the village and turn it into a hell of demons. Wilhelmina was in the cornfield at the time they were sighted. Stripping boiled corn from the husks with a clamshell, she heard the shouting from afar and saw the long line of canoes skimming the river. It was when she emptied her baskets on the sheets of bark outside the wigwam that she recognized the Mikos. Their canoe was the foremost. Wilhelmina froze. Since their departure they had had time to find Sik-spoo and return. And now? Was she now the captive of these most savage of all savages? She stared long at the oncoming canoes, at the throng of cheering Malisetes on the beach, at Jem who had run to share the excitement. She stared until the figures wavered and blurred, and then she retreated to the cornfield.

Nobody was between her and the hill. She could run, unearth a few pouches of dried corn from the storage pits, and so begin the endless journey to Boston, to Jamaica, to England, to wherever Gilbert might be. But Gilbert? No, if he was incapable of reaching Boston in four long years, he was incapable, if indeed he lived at all, of fighting his way into the heart of savage Acadia, incapable of fighting his way out again with a small son.

A small son? By the time such a dream could materialize that small son might be a tall and reluctant boy. She looked at the portage that led up a gully toward the River-of-Eels. Beyond that were rivers and rivers. She could not swim. Without tools she could not build a canoe. Without steel she could not build a fire. Without help she could not survive. In two months the land would be white with snow. In two months she would be dead even if she eluded the savages along the route and outdistanced her pursuers. No, to think of Gilbert now was but to double this anguish. She walked

to the fires, removed the boiled ears from the pots, and with her clamshell began stripping the hardened kernels. Perhaps she would live to eat this corn that would keep for a decade. She had worked hard during this last week, and perhaps Ah-tum-e-gun would intervene. It was no time to be caught idle.

She filled the baskets, pushed the ends of the spoke-logs to the fires' centers, and filled the pots with fresh ears. The howling increased to a frightening pitch as she carried the baskets down to the wigwam. Nobody heeded her. The entire male populace, a screeching horde of devils, was thronged on an acre of ground between the wigwams and river. Pouring the kernels on the sheets of bark, she glimpsed Jem behind the squaws in the outer circle of stamping fiends. Suddenly he was on his hands and knees.

"Jem!"

But her voice was lost among the awesome shrieks. She saw him wriggling under a leather skirt to reappear in a thicket of legs and suddenly vanish. He—Jem, her son—was to view that unknown but horrible sight. After dropping the baskets and running to the crowd, she elbowed, squirmed, and fought her way through the fringe of girls and squaws, through the circle of old men, through the dense pack of warriors. All the boys had wriggled to the inner circle that surrounded four painted braves and eight or ten bearded but otherwise naked Englishmen. Searching for Jem she hardly glanced at the captives, but in that one glance she saw enough to make her sicken and vomit as of old. All but one of the captives were bound hand and foot. The other victim was stretched among four braves who held him by wrists and ankles. The braves were counting, raising the man and letting him fall alternately by pulling and easing on his limbs. That was all she saw, all she could bear to see. But she heard the rest, heard the thunderous shout as the body sailed up into the air, heard the dull thud as the savages listened for the gasp of the victim's breath.

She saw Jem then, an open-mouthed child staring aghast with comprehension. But she never reached him. Before she could move, Ka-ka-kos whirled her around by her hair and half kicked, half pushed her back to the ring of squaws. Desperately she searched the faces, discovered Ah-tum-e-gun, and thoughtlessly pleaded with the squaw. Ah-tum-e-gun scowled, struck her with a rod, and drove her farther and farther from the crowd. In the wigwam she rubbed her bruises with bear grease and then went to the cornfield. But her thoughts were not on her work when she boiled more corn or when she came back to the wigwam and saw the squaws dispersing. Indeed she did not even think of Miko again until, while the squaws erected a wide circle of stakes, he came near on his way to a wigwam. But the sight of his preoccupied face stirred her into action:

"Miko," she demanded as abruptly as her feeble grasp of the language allowed. *"Sum ken-om Sik-spoo-at?"*

If Miko had seen the dead Penobscot he was in no mood to discuss the matter. *"Tabat!"* he snapped, thus ordering her to bite her tongue and instantly thrusting her out of his path.

So! Miko had not seen Sik-spoo after all. He and Kitchimiko had met the homecoming warriors and had returned for the celebration. Perhaps she would have a fortnight of respite. Respite? There was no respite. Existence was one long ordeal of waiting for the inevitable, of dreading that Jem would either die or grow up to be a savage. She did not know which she feared the more. Both fears assailed her night and day. But now, though glad for a moment that he had not been trampled under the stamping Malisetes, she trembled to think that Ah-tum-e-gun was not the attentive stepmother she had thought her to be. The squaw's own son had died. It was the one reason she had adopted Jem.

A cold, wet object touched her skin below the leg of her breeches. She leaped aside and turned. It was a beast (she

was still uncertain whether *ul-a-mus* meant wild dog or tame wolf) with erect ears, sly eyes, and curved fangs. The beasts, all hundreds of the pack, were usually quiet by day, but now and again when a fight developed they snarled and growled to rival even the fierce savagery of their masters. They howled at night almost incessantly, but they never barked nor wagged their tails. It was as if they were kept for. . . . She let the thought complete itself, and it did not make her shudder. Too much horror had robbed her of the capacity to shudder at such an inconsequential thought.

The nearest wigwam had been occupied by several children and a squaw whom Wilhelmina had supposed a widow. But now the squaw, returning from the captives, was accompanied by a brave and a boy in tattered homespuns. About fourteen years old, he was gaunt and sinewy like so many of the frontier youths. His brown hair was bobbed raggedly at the shoulders. Like herself, he seemed to be a captive at large. His eyes met hers once but he showed no surprise. Indeed, she thought, he mistook her for one of the squaws who wore plundered clothing. She was about to approach the dejected boy when Jem, complaining loudly that his bow was broken, toddled up to her. The strange white boy immediately leaped erect.

"English!" he cried, running toward them, but halting at a distance. "Hey young-un! Where ye hail from?" He stared at Wilhelmina. "White—ye white too?"

"I'm from Cocheco."

"I might o' knowed—when I seen his white top. A'mighty! First I took ye fer a breed. Didn't know ye was white." He had been leaning forward as if to see her better, and now he ran the remaining ten paces to her side. "Is ye the bondwoman?"

"Yes."

"I heard about ye. They said ye was real pretty. I thought

yer was done fer—like the soldiers said. Ye ain't a squaw, is ye?"

"Who are you?"

"John Gyles." He ran his fingers through Jem's curly hair. "Hey young-un, what's yer name?"

"Tee-tees," said Jem.

Wilhelmina reminded Jem of his real name and then she searched John's blue eyes. "Are you adopted?"

"Don't know. Don't understand nothin' they says. Why ye ask? Ye mean—ye is?"

"No, nor likely to be. But Jem is. John, will you keep reminding him of his name? Jem—Jem Axford."

"Ye don't figure on livin' long?"

"Promise—please? You will keep reminding him of his name?"

John Gyles was choking on a sob. Until now he had been excited, but the hopelessness of their situation came to him suddenly. He bit his lips bravely, seemed about to run off in tears, and then clung to her as he might have clung to his mother. She let him sob, but somehow she managed to control her own emotions. His story was not identical with her own. With his brothers he had been harvesting hay on his father's field three miles above Fort Charles at Pemaquid. They had been lunching at noon when the Indians came. The farms and village fell quickly, but the soldiers defended the fort for two days. In the end the fort burned. Some of the soldiers and one of John's brothers escaped. The Indians then drove their captives east.

"When was that, John?"

He wiped his eyes on his wrists and pushed himself out of her arms as if at last he could control his tears. "Second o' August. We been a long time comin' here. What you figure the day now?"

"Middle of September. I'm not sure." Beyond him his captor was stalking a drowsy dog.

Wilhelmina hurried Jem into the wigwam. She wondered if unknowingly she had cooked and eaten dog. Some of the cuts that Ah-tum-e-gun had brought to the wigwam had tasted strong. Glancing out the doorway now, she saw flies swarming over the beheaded dog.

"What wrong, Mama?"

Mama? Wondering how long he could continue to think of her as his mother, she knelt and placed her hands on his shoulders. "Mama might have to leave you, Jemmy. Will you miss me?"

"Oh yes, Mama." He seemed to mean it, but there were no tears in his eyes.

Perhaps it was better that way, she thought, thinking also that he was already lost to her. She was his mother, a woman who scolded him at times; but Ah-tum-e-gun was his step-mother, a woman who gratified his every whim.

She thought again of flight. Perhaps John Gyles would help. If John could carry her son while she carried the canoe. . . . The futile idea occupied her until late in the afternoon when the festivities began.

For the first hour while the rattles and birch bark drums beat out the rhythm of the dance Wilhelmina hid in the wigwam, stopping her ears with her hands, ever dreading to hear the shrieking of the tortured. But there were no cries of pain. The stamping of moccasins and the one-two beat of drums and rattles muffled even the song of the warriors. Yet the expected cries of the captives preyed upon her until it seemed that she could bear the waiting no longer. It was then that the scarcely audible voice drew her attention to the doorway.

A bearded, hatless man in a black soutane was stooping low in the doorway. From a thong about his neck a large gold cross swung back and forth. "*Ma fille,*" he was saying when Wilhelmina dropped her hands from her ears. "*Je suis* Père Simon."

French. She did not recognize the language. She merely deduced that it was French because it was neither English nor Indian.

"You are a priest? A Jesuit?"

"Oui!" He nodded and spoke at some length. She could not understand a word, but the very tone of his voice was comforting. Sympathy or sorrow flooded his brown eyes. At last he shook his head wearily and entered the wigwam and then stood with eyes raised toward the smoke vent—toward heaven, she thought. He was speaking, but to her. She listened, feeling his earnestness rather than comprehending his prayer, and somehow drawing either courage or resignation from his words. Courage? Or resignation? She did not examine her feelings. She only knew that here was a friend who gave her comfort. Although the chanting of the Indians had hushed she dreaded his departure, and yet he was even now turning toward the doorway.

A wail of agony, suddenly lost in savage cheers, stopped the priest. *"Dieu au ciel"* His shoulders drooped and although his next word was almost a sigh Wilhelmina recognized it at once. *"Saa-gad!"* It was the same exclamation of pity that Ah-tum-e-gun had used when Jem had stubbed his toe.

"Why, you speak Indian!" She wished now that she had perservered in the language, for she could not repeat her exclamation in the Malisete dialect. But she could tell him her name: *"Ne de-elwize* Wilhelmina."

"Wilhelmina?" Of a sudden he was asking questions, speaking with deliberate care after his first rapid sentences confused her.

Her understanding of Indian far exceeded her speaking vocabulary. She was able to grasp many of his words and to guess many more. Her answers were short. At last when a piteous shriek made her shudder she begged him to forbid the cruelties.

"Hèlas," he sighed, as much as to say that he could do nothing.

He went then. She listened long, but the clamor did not abate until hours after Ah-tum-e-gun brought Jem into the wigwam. Wilhelmina did not see the priest before his departure, but within the fortnight a Frenchman arrived with a band of Penobscots. He spoke English as well as French and Indian. It was from him that she learned why Father Simon could not persuade the Indians to spare the captives. Though some Indians were embracing Christianity the more remote tribes still clung to their ancient mythology. They had myriad deities, all of them cruel. Only one deity, Kluscabe, had ever bade them be merciful.

"Kluscabe—remark that word." Castine paused a moment to let her grasp the significance of the deity's name. "You comprehend, *non?*"

"Kluscabe?" she pondered, deciding that the root of that Indian word was *klus-co* which meant *false*. At once she realized that the merciful god's name implied that he was a liar. "Yes," she said. "I understand."

"So you will comprehend why they have laugh for Jesus. It is like this they reason: Kluscabe ees merciful and Jeses ees merciful; Kluscabe ees false, and so? Jesus, he ees false too. *Comprenez?* It is the same ting in all the east tribes. Kluscabe ees a god for story and laugh everywhere. My wife—she ees a Penobscot—she say Kluscabe. The Malisete, he say Kuluscap. And the Micmac, he say Glooscap. So? The priests, they are lucky if they can baptize a dying infant. You comprehend now why Père Simon can do nothing?"

She understood. And she was to understand more and more while the Baron de Saint Castine exercised his knowledge of English. He was on his way to Quebec. As an officer of the Règiment du Carignan he had come to Canada, had later cast his lot with the savages, had married the daughter of Madoka-wando, chief of the Penobscots, and had since

become a veritable god among them. His stronghold was at the mouth of the Penobscot River. His daughters had married French gentlemen of Quebec. His sons had become Indian warriors. They were already in Canada recruiting savages for an onslaught against Schenectady, an English outpost in the valley of the Mohawks.

As Castine told of his sons he grasped her arm. She tugged it away in spite of his iron grip.

"You strong," he said, stroking his beard. "You make handsome princess. You would like one of my sons, *peut-être?*" His eyebrows knitted. "Consider. One day my sons will rule all these lands. Already they become war chiefs. No? You refuse? Is it that you prefer a Malisete?"

"Do you mean I may become a squaw—if I wish?"

"*Certainement.* You are the widow of Sik-spoo, *non?* If what you tell me is true. . . ." He went on to explain that she had but to blacken her face, climb the hill, and mourn her husband. Thus she would prove that she was not a captive but an Indian woman. She would not have to die. The lament was simple, *Ha-we, ha-we, ha-we,* each syllable dragged out sorrowfully and the whole repeated until nightfall. When she returned to the wigwam she would have suitors in plenty. "Ah, but you do not wish a Malisete brave, I see. You will consider my son, *oui?*"

She shook her head again, told him about Jem and Gilbert. "I cannot," she said.

"We shall see." Castine's narrowed eyes revealed resolution instead of anger. "Perhaps a winter among the Malisetes will change your mind. Remember—my sons have white blood, my blood."

"A winter? Shall I live?"

"I shall speak to Ka-ka-kos. You will live the winter. In the summer you will agree to marry François, I think. *Oui,* you will marry my son."

And so, when Miko and Kitchi-miko finally did bring news

of Sik-spoo's death, Wilhelmina was spared the choice of dying a captive or becoming a Malisete squaw. She was to have a year of respite, an entire year to instill Jem with the ambition to escape when he became a man. The prospect was enough to give her courage that comes of hope, however faint it be.

Chapter 17

OCTOBER brought heavier frosts, stripped the red and gold from maples and birches, and stirred the Indians to activity. Normally it was the time to load the canoes and paddle upstream to the winter camps, but this autumn Meductic was not to be deserted. Indeed the village grew daily. Savages arrived from every tribe in the east. Council fires burned late into the nights. Warriors competed in violent games, tribe against tribe. Canoes laden with corn, powder, ball, hatchets and knives came down from the north. The headquarters of the Abenaki tribe became an arsenal.

The time came for the Malisete tribe, until now the host of the various bands, to muster its own war party. On that day all the Malisetes, squaws and children included, crowded the fort.

Wilhelmina—afraid of the Pennacooks, Penobscots, Passamaquoddies, and Micmacs who stalked the wigwams outside the palisades—took refuge with the Malisete squaws and children who sat in a deep circle behind the men.

John Gyles found her as the ceremony began. "What are

they up to" he whispered excitedly. "They ain't got a white left—'cept us."

She explained that the chief was recruiting warriors for the campaign against New England.

"But that dog's head!" John whispered eagerly. "All scorched an' shrivelled up till its teeth shows? What's it fer? What's he holdin' it up fer—an' singin' like?"

She listened to the war song awhile and translated it as best she could: "I am a great warrior. Even in the midst of danger I fear nothing."

John squeezed her arm. "Lookee! Puttin' the dog's head on a stick and holdin' high! What's he singin' now?"

"He's naming the town he intends to attack—and the chief man there." Deliberately Wilhelmina tried to horrify the boy who seemed to delight in the spectacle. His attitude depressed her. "That is the way he will carry the chief man's head—on a stick. And now he's asking who will go with him to the war."

"God a'mighty! Them howls! They all wants to go?"

She answered when the shouting died. "Some must remain to do the hunting. The chief is picking his men—the ones he's giving the head to."

The selection lasted an hour. It was followed by an orgy of dancing and singing that continued while the squaws boiled dog meat for the feast. Afterwards, while the men sang and ate in the fort, the squaws were free to go. Wilhelmina followed close behind Ah-tum-e-gun and Jem as far as the wigwam, but the squaw ordered her up to the hill for firewood. When she returned with an armload her son and Ah-tum-e-gun were dancing around the pot and singing:

Wa-ka-kee o nalo wo,
We-ka-ke o nalo wo.

Jem was enjoying the dance. She had not seen him so gay in months. She did not protest, but tears welled into her eyes

when her son ignored her completely. Unwilling to show her emotion she went outside. John Gyles came over.

"What ye cryin' fer? They done somethin'?"

"That squaw!" Wilhelmina burst into sobs and could not tell him for a minute. At last she blurted: "She stole my baby—and now—now she's stealing his affections too."

John offered sympathy, but he did not seem to understand. "*Ul-a-mus wul-a-de-sis!*" he exclaimed after a moment. "They ain't doin' him no harm. He's adopted like me."

She searched the boy's blue eyes. "John, don't you want to escape?"

"Well—some time maybe."

It was as she had imagined. John Gyles was beginning to like his lot. That expression he had used: *Ul-a-mus wal-a-de-sis!* It was a favourite Malisete exclamation: Little dog dish! Soon he would be speaking Malisete and dancing at the feasts. She thought of Jem and began crying again, this time ignoring John when he asked her the trouble. He wouldn't understand. He wasn't a mother.

She ignored John during the remainder of that day, but before they parted for the winter she made an attempt to warn him against the fascination which the forest seemed to hold for him.

"Good-bye," John Gyles called sadly after his guardian ordered him into the family canoe. And then more heartily: "I'll get away from this stinkin' ol Injun, never ye fear."

"Good-bye, John!" As she watched the canoe gliding up the river it seemed to move out of sight abruptly. She rubbed her eyes and saw it again, a wavering blur that finally disappeared behind an island. A startling voice whirled her around.

"Wa-wil-om-wa, he sorrow."

It was Mal-ko-kee, the Penobscot half-breed. Stained with those more enduring red and blue war paints boiled from

alder bark and rotten wood, his face looked hostile at first. Only when he smiled reassuringly was she able to reply.

"Yes, Mal-ko-kee, I mourn."

"You not sorrow for Sik-spoo. The Yengee man, he is the sorrow?"

"Yes—Jem's father."

"We go next day. You good strong squaw. You come with me?"

The proposal was no surprise. Mal-ko-kee had wanted her even before Sik-spoo's death. For a moment she deliberated, thinking how she might elude him when the war party invaded New England. "Yes, Mal-ko-kee, if my son comes with us."

Mal-ko-kee shook his head. "We cannot steal the boy. Ka-ka-kos, he fight me. The Penobscot tribe not want war with Wool-us-took tribe. We allies."

"Then I can't go with you." Recognizing the anger in his dark eyes, she appeasingly added: "It's impossible, Ma-ko-kee. I am promised to a son of Castine. Next summer I go to Quebec to marry."

"François?" Mal-ko-kee's inflection betrayed surprise. It was as if he had walked blindly to the edge of a precipice and only now discovered his danger. "François? That one?"

"Yes. Why do you speak like that? Is François so bad?"

Mal-ko-kee studied her figure from head to foot, stared at the tanned skin of her wrists and ankles as if he had never fully appreciated her until now. "You good good like the river. How you say good good?" He struggled to summon an English word that eluded his memory. "*Wool-a,*" he blurted. "You not tell François this talk?"

So! Mal-ko-kee feared François. What manner of savage was Castine's son? The question depressed her but the answer might terrify her. She changed the subject quickly:

"You go tomorrow with the warriors?"

"Next day."

"Mal-ko-kee, I wish to send a letter—*wam-pap*—to my people. You are going there. Will you take the *wam-pap*?"

Amazement came over his painted face. "You make *wam-pap*?"

"Yes. Will you, Mal-ko-kee?"

The amazement changed to perplexity, then to amusement. "I go for kill. I kill Yengee. I give *wam-pap* to dead Yengee!" He laughed callously and agreed: "You make *wam-pap* now."

Later, while she wrote on birch bark with a sharpened crow quill dipped in a pot of red stain, she heard Mal-ko-kee explaining the joke to the watching braves. They laughed hilariously and asked for messages to their own victims.

"*Maskew*," she demanded when they crowded close. "More birch bark." They kept her busy until through practice her script was neat and legible in spite of the flaws in the bark:

To Governor: Autumn 1689
I am Wilhelmina Roebury late of Cocheco. Now I am captive of Miliceet Indiens on Saint John River in Acadia. They take me to Quebec after winter.

Not all the messages were identical. Some were long, some short. In some she mentioned her son, in others, John Gyles. But the Indians were so clamorous that most of the notices were brief.

On the following morning the Crow family—Ka-ka-kos, Ah-tum-e-gun, Wilhelmina and Jem—set out for their winter camp. Traveling leisurely for two weeks, they ascended the Saint John River to Grand Falls and portaged around the gorge. A few days later they repaired an old wigwam and settled down for the cold months. Snow whitened the landscape. The river froze.

Wilhelmina occasionally remembered the notes she had written on birch bark, but she despaired of them ever reaching the governor. Even if the governor did receive them he

would scarcely despatch an army to rescue the mistress of Roebury let alone a bondwoman and her fatherless son.

Fatherless? Carrying the pail of water up to the wigwam, she heard Jem laughing. She halted to listen. Ka-ka-kos was telling a story and she wondered how much of it Jem understood. Entering the wigwam, she heard him exclaim:

"Wul-a-de-sis! Un-mi-tauks—mina! Mina!"

Mina? No, he was not addressing her. He was facing Ka-ka-os and clamoring for another story. "Little dish!" was the literal translation of his first exclamation. Of his second: "My father—more again! More again!"

Not *mi-tauks*—not Papa. But *un-mi-tauks*—my Papa.

His father! Wilhelmina ought to have been surprised at the boy's remarkable grasp of the language. Little more than three years old he was at that age when words are acquired unconsciously, but even so, his use of stopped consonants and glotallized vowels ought to have amazed her. Yet at the moment she scarcely noticed his choice of language. It was his attitude toward Ka-ka-kos that shocked her into the depths of sorrow. Bitterly she thought how Jem had never had a father to tell him stories, to pat him on the head and feel his muscle. It was another of his many needs that she had never provided.

"Jemmy," she said after placing the water near the fire, "the Crow is not your father. You mustn't call him Papa."

Ka-ka-kos disliked English at any time, and now he looked at her suspiciously, belligerently, before turning to Jem:

"What did she say?" he demanded in Malisete.

The boy looked from one to the other. She thought of guiding his answer to protect herself, but she had a great need to know if he would shield her or betray her, to know if his heart still belonged to her. In the suspense of waiting for him to speak it seemed that her very life depended on his answer. Now he was looking at Ka-ka-kos and trying to compose a sentence.

"*Kuh,*" Jem began, separating the pronoun from the negative by a thoughtful pause. "*Kuh moo . . .*" It was ungrammatical, even mispronounced, but it was clear enough. "You are not . . ." The next word would be *un-mi-tauks,* my father. It should come to him easily, for he had used it already. Yet he hesitated, looking at his mother's anxious face.

Ka-kakos and Ah-tum-e-gun leaned close to hear the answer which they already suspected.

"*Kuh moo . . .*" Still Jem hesitated. It was as if he realized that he was betraying her, as if he had said too much and could neither recall nor change the truth to a lie.

For Wilhelmina his hesitation was heartening. He still loved her. Suddenly she wanted him to deny Ka-ka-kos, to name his real father. If he could do that now she could hope that in spite of the years ahead he might remember and go to his own people. "Tell them, Jemmy. Tell them the truth."

He grinned, much relieved. "*Kuh moo un-mi-tauks,*" he told Ka-ka-kos, repeating it proudly in English. "You are not my father."

She did not mind the beating that followed. It hurt her body but not her spirit. Her spirit sang with the hope that Jem would always remember the truth. Afterwards she began to despair again, but for a time that hope sustained her during the ordeal of waiting and waiting. For what? She dreaded the answer.

Perhaps it was well that the rigors of winter distracted her from dread of the coming summer. Winter in northern Acadia was such as she had never experienced in Cocheco. There were no thaws. The snow piled higher and higher. It seemed that they could never survive until spring. Yet she need not have worried. Ka-ka-kos was a good hunter. Caribou and moose were plentiful. She need not have worried about Jem either. By night swaddled in furs and by day clothed in shirts and leggings of Ah-tum-e-gun's making, he was in

no danger of suffering from the cold. Only during March and April when the snow was melting did his moccasins soak up water, and even then he did not fall ill. Ah-tum-e-gun, perhaps because she had lost a son of her own, was as watchful as Wilhelmina herself.

The ice ran. Ka-ka-kos waited until the small birds were mating, and then ordered the canoe loaded for the descent. At every village the Crow canoe was joined by others until, nearing Meductic, the flotilla numbered more than a hundred canoes, most of them covered with moosehide but some with birch bark.

The birch bark canoes were the swifter, Wilhelmina observed when, now that her season of respite was drawing to its close, she contemplated one last attempt to escape. She would steal a small birch, portage it overland to a point far up the River-of-Eels, and hide it there. When the opportunity arose she would leave Meductic by night, and by dawn she and Jem would be far toward the Penobscot. At best her plan was hazardous, for swift pursuit was assured and the distance to New England was great, but there seemed no alternative. If she waited too long even that opportunity would be lost. Castine might send for her at any time.

Yet at Meductic she was forced to wait until the warriors, who might encounter her on the streams, returned from New England. They did not come until the corn, squash, and red beans were planted, and even then some stragglers were to follow. She delayed her flight from week to week while the captives, living on and on in their agonies, screamed for mercy above the singing and dancing of the victorious warriors. Despairing of ever instituting her plan, she was hiding a sack of corn in the woods when a hush fell over Meductic. Curious, for the victory celebration had seemed endless, she hurried back to the village.

The captives were still moaning, but the warriors seemed to have forgotten them, for the entire populace thronged

the beach. Now and again Wilhelmina caught glimpses of a Micmac in the midst of the crowd, and she learned that the English had come in ships to the French town of Port Royal. The fort had fallen. The Micmac said this had happened one moon ago.

Wilhelmina had only the vaguest conception of the territory that lay to the immediate south, but she did know that Port Royal, the chief stronghold of the French in Acadia, was situated on a mass of land shaped like a long, irregular Indian potato. Attached to the mainland by a slender stalk, it dangled in the ocean. She knew that much already, and questioning Ka-ka-kos, she learned that Port Royal lay directly opposite the mouth of this very river—across a wide bay.

That night there was no interference. Dogs growled at their heels and then fought over the meat Wilhelmina gave them, but she and Jem reached the canoe without mishap. It was a large birch, selected for stability on the choppy bay. Quietly she made ready, sliding the canoe into the water, placing her heavy bundle on the footboards, and telling Jem to sit near the bow. In a moment they were drifting downstream. For long minutes while her paddle flashed in the moonlight she was in full view of the village, but no alarm was raised.

Within an hour she was opposite the mouth of the River-of-Eels. The eagle's nest in the tall pines was the only landmark she recognized during the night, for now the river bore her into forests she had never seen. Animals splashed under the banks, but she had no fear of them. All her emotions were centered on the dark stretch of water to the rear.

They overtook her in the morning. Punishment was swift but surprisingly light, a few cuffs and kicks. The physical pain scarcely rivalled the bitterness of failure and resignation when Ka-ka-kos laughed and asked if she knew that Port Royal was again garrisoned by the French.

Her attempt to escape was a great joke to all except Wil-

helmina. They told the story a hundred times. They told it to every brave that came during the summer. Every Indian in Acadia knew about Wa-wil-om-wa. They laughed at her and yet they respected her too. She would please François, they said, and when she had a son of her own she would not wish to run away. She would no longer be a fool like that Englishman, Phips, who had taken the French stronghold of Port Royal only to sail away without leaving a garrison.

Chapter 18

Sir William Phips, moving his muscular lips as he laboriously spelled out a word on the requisition, felt uncomfortable, self-conscious. Nobody was going to say he could read no better than a deck hand. He could if he had all day. There wasn't anything he couldn't do if he had the time. Smarting, expecting to catch a look of amusement in Major Walley's eyes, he deepened his frown and glanced across the table. The major was idly paring his nails with a paper knife, but he may have been watching. Get rid of the man, thought Phips.

"This looks right an' proper," he said aloud. "Main thing, though, is the overland army. If we're gonna take the whole o' Canada them men's got to start marchin'. Ye better go ashore an' see how the musterin's goin'."

"Certainly, sir." Wally scraped his chair on the deck as he stood up. "Was wondering," he probed, "when we may expect to sail for Quebec."

"Soon's a bloomin' pilot can be found," Sir William fumed. Immediately he regretted his outburst. To have no breeding was one thing, but to show it was another. Yet what was the use of pretending? They all knew he came of frontier stock. There wasn't one of them but laughed behind his back and told how he was the twenty-sixth son of a Maine shepherd. Well, let 'em laugh. He'd come up in the world, hadn't he? Knighted by the King! There now, that was something. Wasn't every Tom Dick got to be knighted.

Sir William was feeling better now, so much better that he relaxed in his chair and smiled up at Major Walley.

"Soon's we get a pilot what knows the Saint Lawrence River. Sent to England fer one, I did. Ought to be showin', up afore the end o' July." Damme, he thought. His luck was runnin' out. Blast them Frenchmen in Acadia. Not a one o' 'em ever been to Quebec by ship—else they was all lyin'.

He was downcast again, but the sight of Major Walley retreating toward the scramble net eased his discomfiture.

"I'll take Quebec like I took Port Royal," he muttered to himself. "See if I don't. I got innards."

Yes, he was a hard-fisted shipwright that didn't let nothin' stand in his way. Take that crew mutinied off Jamaicy. Now they was something. Licked them all, he did, single-handed.

The table resounded as he banged it with the same big fist that had smashed the boatswain's jaw. Yes, he didn't swing no axe fer nothin' in them days on the Sheepscot afore the Injins drove him out. Built him a ship, he did, with his own bare hands. An' could do it again, b'dammel He felt immensely powerful now, invincible. He'd take Quebec right enough. He was a sight more likely to reach Canada with his thirty-two ships than Winthrop was with his army. Marchin' overland, eh? Cocksure o' gettin' there first, eh? We'll see about that.

Sir William was in danger of losing confidence in himself, for at this late date in June it looked as if Winthrop would

march north long before the ships weighed anchor. And so Phips sought to bolster his ego. He caught sight of young Axford leaning over the rail and staring vacantly at the waves. The *London Packet* was docking, but Phips did not expect news this soon. He continued to watch Axford.

"Now there's a 'ristocrat fer ye. I done a sight better'n him when I was his age. An' I wasn't born with none o' his prospects. Me, I went up in the world. But him? Started high, and look at him now. No more life in him than a jellyfish."

Exalted at last with self-confidence, Sir William forgot his own deficiencies and dwelt on Axford. "Now there's a man what needs a talkin' to to wake him up. A man like that ain't worth his salt in a campaign, and by the Willie Phips I'm the man ain't standin' fer no nonsense." Sir William wondered what could be done about it. He liked Axford, had even pitied him when the story had come out in a torrent of anguish during the celebration after the capture of Port Royal in Acadia. Port Royal in Acadia. Sir William stroked his jaw thoughtfully, juxtaposing Axford's story with one of his own recollections.

"No wonder Axford's dead inside. He didn't make up that story—leastways not the part about Port Royal in Jamaicy. I 'member that night as clear as day. Hmmmm. Hit hard, that man—if it was all true. Hit mighty hard. Hmmmm . . . What he needs is to be hit harder. Hmmmm . . . The way to bring a man like that around . . . Aye, maybe 'twould work."

Sir William got up, ducked out from under the awning, and crossed the deck toward the rail where Axford was gazing at the water. The ships were motionless on the harbor and the air above Boston was dead in the afternoon heat—as dead as Axford, thought Phips. Smoke had risen in columns above the chimneys, but now it seemed not to move.

You couldn't stir up a wind but you could stir up a man. Mighty sure you could.

"Axford," he exploded.

Gilbert turned slowly. Although another man would have winced at the commander's sharp tone, Gilbert felt only a mild curiosity. He wondered if Phips had spoken to him before and if he had not heard. "Yes, sir?"

"What in damnation's wrong with you? Sick?"

"Why no. No, sir. Just waiting."

"Waitin'? In God's name—what fer?" He was genuinely angry now. The indifference of the man!

Gilbert shrugged, stared into those bulging eyes and decided that his answer would provoke the commander still further. Scarcely caring, he gave the answer anyway. "For action," he said listlessly.

"Action, eh?" Sir William kept his temper under control, a difficult feat for one so impulsive. Normally a man of action himself, he was irritable after weeks of waiting for a pilot who could not arrive for another month. "Thought ye had enough o' it?"

"Something to keep me busy—just anything, sir."

Phips had a notion to put him to work scrubbing the deck, but he remembered his original purpose. Wake the moper up, he urged himself. Hit him hard.

"Axford. Ye're a fool, a whimperin' pup. What ye needs is innards." He waited for a reaction that was not forthcoming. "So? Ye know it, eh? Shows in yer eyes—only ye don't care a mite if it does. I've a mind to give ye a good thrashin'." He held up a fist, tightened the fingers until the brown knuckles turned as white as the heavy bones beneath the skin. "See that?"

Gilbert looked down at his own and thought it half the size. "It's a big fist," he said, thinking: But not big enough to batter down the rock of Quebec. There would be action at Quebec, though. This boisterous, loud-mouthed, head-

strong man would see to that—and probably blunder. A man could be lucky for years, marry his girl, recover a Spanish treasure from the bottom of the sea, scare a garrison of Frenchmen out of a fort in Acadia, but sooner or later his luck ended. And he was finished. This over-confident commander was due for a jolt one day, perhaps at Quebec, and then he would understand. "It's a mighty fist, sir."

"What would ye de if it hit ye?"

"Why, sir, I don't know. . . ."

"Don't know? Damme, man. Wouldn't ye fight back. That's what's wrong with ye. . . ." He was seldom able to channel a conversation, but this time he had succeeded. "You've no innards," he went on. "Ye don't hanker fer things —an' when ye do ye don't fight fer them. Ye just wishes—an' hopes it'll come. Ye see what I mean?"

He had no wishes, no hopes. If she was alive it would be different. "Not exactly, sir."

"Well, I'm tellin' ye." Now was the time to hit him hard—now, while he looked as if he was stabbed close to the heart. "Ye wanted somethin' once, Axford. Or so ye said back there at Port Royal. I mind another Port Royal—in Jamaicy. I was there that night, right there aboard me ship. Ye didn't know that, eh?"

"Sir? First of August, '86?"

"First o' August, it was—three days afore the hurricane. An' ye, ye blunderin' fool, ye sailed right into it. Thought ye was a seaman, but ye wasn't. Didn't ye ever wonder why no ship put out in chase? No, ye didn't stop to think." Somehow the conversation was progressing badly. It wasn't what he had meant to say at all. The punch he had meant to deal had lost itself somewhere in the back of his mind, but he would find it and deliver it yet. "Ye didn't stop to think," he repeated.

"I had to go on. I couldn't wait. They would have caught us."

"Ye could o' boarded my ship. Think what ye missed—a share in the treasure we scooped out o' the sea. An' a quick voyage to England and 'cross the ocean to Boston—all inside the year—'stead o' two years castaway."

"You'd have turned me in," Gilbert reminded Phips, bewildered by the commander's great effort to impress him.

"The point is, Axford, ye never stopped to think if I would of or not. Ye never made the try. 'Stead, ye was happy to take a worse chance with the sea. So maybe gettin' wrecked in the Bahamas was just a piece o' bad luck. So maybe it was." His voice was cruel now, sarcastic; his words clumsy, but bearing down upon the matter's core. "Then what did ye do?" It was a rhetorical question, one to be answered by himself, but Axford, blast his 'pertinence, was about to reply, and somehow it was impossible to beat him to words.

"I did what I could—and tried to reach the mainland."

The answer, almost identical with his own, suited Phips. "Of course ye tried. Ye tried—but did ye try like ye ought? No, ye didn't want her that bad—not till too late. Ye didn't want her bad enough to try hard—hard—like a man with innards." He lowered his voice, knowing that thus his point would be more effective. "Just think, Axford, if ye'd tried harder ye would o' got there in time. Ye might o' saved her—if ye'd tried." There, he'd made his point, and Axford ought to be staggered by the blow. But what in God's name was wrong with Axford? Didn't he feel nothin'? The blow had no effect. Along with his disappointment Sir William had a feeling that, powerful as the blow was, the recipient had not even vaguely realized that he had been struck. It was as if Axford had no feelings at all. No, not just that. It was as if Axford had already blamed himself, had already tortured himself, had long ago suffered all the remorse of one who could have succeeded but had failed.

Sir William was raging under his red skin. He had never been defeated in an undertaking before today. Always he

had managed to accomplish his self-imposed tasks. There wasn't anything he couldn't do, he had always told himself. And now he experienced the doubts and terrors of frustration. "God," he thought, shaken. "A man needs a few knocks in life. Brings out his innards. But there ain't no call for a knock what can't be stood." He glared at Axford, clenched his hand, looked at the white bones awhile, and drove his fist hard at a deadeye of the shrouds. The wood splintered and released the taut stay that whipped up to the masthead and tangled in the rigging.

"Come on," he muttered to Axford after a moment of silence. "We'll tap a dram or two while ye reads me the requisitions. Gov'ner'll have to sign 'em today. Ye want to go ashore?"

"Why, I don't mind, sir. I'll take them up to Province House."

He said it indifferently, for he had no presage of events to come, and even while strolling up King Street that afternoon he had no suspicion. The way to Province House was a familiar one to Gilbert. He scarcely saw the sailors and militiamen loitering on the corners, although for one brief moment an almost forgotten uniform, that of a privateman of Kirke's Lambs, startled him into an awareness of the life about him—a dog panting in a shop doorway, a chicken pecking oats under a wagon, the townsfolk skirting a knot of sailors all but blocking the street. He wondered dully what the Lambs—three by the count and perhaps more—were doing in Boston. But his interest subsided and he forgot them. Nothing mattered. You just took one breath after another, kept living, hoping you could sleep come night.

He kicked a lump of earth. The ridges between the ruts in the street had dried, had crumbled under the wide rims of wheels, had turned into dust that stirred in the heat underfoot, but here and there a clod off the ridges had escaped disintegration. He kicked another. It burst into fragments

and dust. Nobody, he thought, could ever restore that clod to its original form. There were things you couldn't do.

He remembered his mission when he saw Province House. Inside it was cooler. A man—another one of those Lambs, an officer this time—was sitting in the hall waiting to see the governor. The face looked strangely familiar, especially that long nose with the thin bone showing white under the skin; but not until Gilbert announced himself to a servant did he take a second look at the officer who had stood up and was now staring at him out of surprised eyes that immediately narrowed. It was Captain Vetch.

Gilbert remembered that he ought to hate the officer, but he had no surge of emotion, no feeling except the surprise of recognition. He did not even wish for the capacity to feel hatred. Vetch was there, but the officer might have been any one of many forgotten people. Had Vetch been one of Gilbert's own brothers there would have been a moment of mild pleasure but no real excitement. Nothing could stir him deeply.

Captain Vetch came forward, his worm-like lips parting and then tightening as if he had checked an exclamation. "A good afternoon to you," he managed formally although his pleasure was obvious.

"At your service, Captain." Gilbert's tone conveyed neither resentment nor welcome. It was automatic and meant nothing.

"A pleasure, Gilbert of Axford, a pleasure I anticipated. The Lady Wilhelmina fares well, I trust?" That last was more than a civility. It was a question fraught with urgency, and it puzzled Gilbert until he realized that none in England knew of the tragedy. There had been none to notify. She was the last of her line. "I took passage on the *London Packet* for the express purpose of finding you," Vetch went on hastily. "The King decrees Roebury is Milady's. You have not heard?" He paused but continued when Gilbert made no reply. "Do not misunderstand me, I pray. I relinquish all claim to the

estate—since I must." That note of truth was convincing. "The writ of attainder against Milady has been annulled, and so—Roebury is hers."

What? Had Vetch been in possession of Roebury? Of course, that had been his motive in destroying the rightful heirs. Gilbert experienced a rare pang of disgust. This solicitous rogue in front of him, ignorant of the rightful owner's death, had come to beg forgiveness, to plead for favors. But Vetch's servility would expire in the knowledge that Wilhelmina could never claim Roebury. The spark of disgust ignited a slow fire of revulsion in Gilbert and the emotion was enough to restrain his tongue. He let Vetch writhe, implore:

"If I could speak to the lady—explain my motives. . . ."

Gilbert found no pleasure in the officer's apparent anxiety. The leaden ache in his heart thickened and overwhelmed his being, to the extinction of lesser sensations. He heard no more. There was a tap on his shoulder and the realization that the governor was waiting on him, that presently the governor would wait on Silas Vetch also. Gilbert felt his coat pocket, drew out the requisition, and followed the servant into the office.

Governor Bradstreet was in his eighties, a tired old man nodding behind the desk. His hands were clasped behind his thin neck, but he seemed deep in thought rather than asleep. His head nodded as if in agreement with some mental process.

Content to wait, Gilbert scanned the untidy desk. Littered with documents, it was unsightly enough without that small weather-beaten cylinder of birch bark. The governor must have received a letter from some frontiersman who had resorted to birch bark instead of paper. The square of bark had curled up like a napkin holder. Gilbert thought: The old man has not long to govern the colony. The responsibilities of the war with Canada would probably demand too

much from him. Well, let him ponder. There was plenty of time for that. Phips couldn't set sail until he found a pilot familiar with the Saint Lawrence, and for want of one he would probably wait too long and in the end would try to navigate the big river without a pilot.

Gilbert scarcely cared if he ever reached Quebec. What difference could it make to him? Thus he thought, yet deep in his mind he knew that the French had instigated the Abenakis to attack the English settlements, that if Quebec were conquered there would be no more such massacres.

He unrolled the requisition and pushed it across the desk toward the nodding old man. The curl of birch bark toppled over and rolled onto the document. The frontiersman had used some kind of bright dye instead of ink. The message, whatever it was, had been printed in large letters, but the dye had run as if a messenger had carried the bark in a damp pocket. Only one side of the cylinder was exposed to him. He found himself deciphering the red characters:

To Govern . . . To Governor, he imagined.

I am Wil . . . William somebody, no doubt.

Now I am . . . No puzzle there.

Saint John . . . That river across from Port Royal?

To Quebek . . . Something to do with the campaign? Maybe Phips would be interested. He picked up the birch bark scroll and studied it more closely. It had a date: Autumn, 1689. That was last year. A mighty long time in coming here, he observed, observing also that the old man had opened his eyes. "Oh! Governor Bradstreet—your pardon, sir."

"What now, Axford? More trivia?"

"The requisition, sir—for your signature."

The governor bent over it, and unerringly his old eyes ran down the list to an item of which he disapproved. "Rum. That much? What does Sir William take us for?"

Gilbert did not hear the question. He still had the square of birch bark, and it was shaking in his hands.

"I say, Axford, what about this rum? God in heaven, man! What ails you?"

"She's—alive." He said it aloud, but his being resisted the words. They were too incredible to accept quickly. All his recollections struggled to discredit his eyes. She was dead and he knew it. Every sinew, bone, and particle of his body knew it, had known it for some time now. His brain had known first, a year ago when he had found the smoking ashes of Cocheco. But his body had disbelieved, had driven him into the forest, into the north: to a pond where the savages had camped overnight, to the head of the stream, across a watershed, on and on into the north. At last his body had begun to believe, and his numbed body and brain had come back with scarcely the will to survive. The brain had been the first to know she was dead, and now it was the first to know she was alive. But for one instant the rest of his being could not believe, and he felt no emotion until suddenly all the remorse and grief of a year disintegrated and left him panting with excitement—even as he had been on that day before reaching Cocheco. The rapturous shock disabled him for just one more instant, and he dropped the birch bark, but suddenly he was shouting:

"She's alive. She's alive." He had to tell everybody. He ran to the door. Outside in the hall some officer was waiting. "She's alive," Gilbert told him at the top of his voice.

The street was deserted, but in King Street some eighty or ninety people heard the news as he raced down to the waterfront. He could scarcely sit in the boat as the astonished sailors rowed him out to the *Six Friends.*

As did some of the crew, Phips seemed to understand him. But it was a fortnight before all Boston considered him sane.

By that time Gilbert was deep in his plans. Exasperated by Phips' delay in sailing for Quebec, Gilbert requested a trans-

fer to the militia. The request was granted, and presently he was with a foot-company, marching west to Deerfield on the Connecticut River, still farther west to Albany on the Hudson. There the companies from the four colonies participating in the campaign joined forces under Fitz-John Winthrop.

Chapter 19

WINTHROP'S STRATEGY was to advance northward up the Hudson and to descend on Canada by way of Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River. But from the outset Winthrop's plans failed. The expected supplies from New York did not arrive. The men hungered and fell ill. Worst of all, there seemed no co-ordination among the various units. Instead of waiting for their English allies, the Iroquois Indians had gone on ahead, and it soon appeared that the troops would never overtake the savages.

Frustrated by Winthrop's misfortunes, Gilbert began to lose heart and to wish that he had remained with Phips who would sail for Quebec eventually, with or without a pilot. Gilbert considered returning to Boston, but the way was long, and the thought of missing the fleet was too disturbing. There was only one course to follow, he decided when smallpox broke out in the encampment; and that course he immediately took. He deserted. He traded his musket for an elm bark canoe and paddled north.

But he was doomed to disappointment again. The Iroquois whom he hoped to join met him on Lake Camplain. They

had been defeated and were now paddling back to their forts. Some of them spoke English. Frontenac, the only Frenchman whom they feared, had returned from France, had mustered his Canadian Indians at Montreal, and had discouraged the Iroquois—even those who a year ago had overrun Montreal Island and massacred the populace. This Frontenac, Gilbert decided, was neither a weakling like Winthrop nor a blusterer like Phips. The conquest of Canada was not to succeed. Gilbert knew it, but he knew also that somehow, God only knew how, he would reach Quebec. Somehow he would find Wilhelmina.

But none of the Iroquois would accompany him. Frontenac's warriors, they said, were too many, too well led. Frontenac whom the Iroquois called Onontio, the Great Mountain, had already captured one of their war chiefs, one Atiron, the Wildcat, and a score of his Mohawk braves. They would never see Atiron again. He had been given over to the Canadian Indians.

There was naught to do but proceed alone. Gilbert paddled to the foot of Lake Champlain and entered the Richelieu River. In June he would not have trembled at the thought of death, but now, late in August, he had much to lose. Life had meaning again. The magnitude of his venture impressed him with the need for extreme caution, and the dread of failure overwhelmed his compulsion to hurry. As a consequence he travelled warily, concealing his canoe by day and paddling down the Richelieu by night.

The wisdom of vigilance was soon apparent. Drifting around a bend one night he heard shouts farther downstream. His first instinct was to go ashore, but logic told him that he was in no immediate danger. The Canadian Indians, after pursuing the retreating Iroquois, were camped for the night.

What to do? If tomorrow they ascended the river he had only to hide and let them pass. But it was possible that they

had abandoned the pursuit. In that event they might camp on the river for several days. Gilbert fretted at the thought of delay and dipped his paddle. He would pass them in the darkness.

Presently he saw the firelight. The Indians were encamped on the east side where the river narrowed abruptly between steep banks. He despaired as the canoe drifted nearer, for the high flames illuminated the water. The Canadian Indians, perhaps thinking the Iroquois might return, had selected their camp site well. Guards were probably watching the river. No canoe could pass unobserved.

They were celebrating, he decided, observing their shadows dancing on the opposite cliff and hearing a fresh outburst of shouts. Could it be that they were torturing their Mohawk prisoners? Backing water with his paddle, Gilbert listened for the pleas of the captives, but their shrieks, if any, were lost in the uproar.

And now he was drifting perilously close to the illuminated stretch of water. He peered ahead, considering a dash through the light and into the darkness beyond. The idea tempted him, but all at once he was fully aware of the result. He would be seen, pursued, overtaken. And like the Mohawk captives he would be tortured. What then of Wilhelmina?

The Indians were howling and dancing around a stake between two great fires situated about thirty feet back from the edge of the steep river bank. The water was bright with firelight, but the narrow strip of beach in the shadow of the high bank was so dark that for a moment Gilbert did not discern the canoes there. When he did see them he knew at once what he must do, and he paddled to the shore some ten strokes above the fringe of the lighted area. His plan was simple enough. Hidden by the bank, he would walk down the dark beach, steal the farthest canoe, and proceed on his way.

Now he lifted the bow of his own canoe onto a rock so

that it would not float away, shouldered his provisions, and slunk down the beach, keeping close to the bank. Some of the canoes were overturned, others left open to the weather. Most were in the shadow, but here and there one protruded out into the light. The beach was stony and obstructed by large boulders. Although he had little fear of being heard or seen, for the Indians were yelling as if a captive had delighted them with an expression of pain, he proceeded quietly, passing canoe after canoe until suddenly one of them trembled as if an occupant had stirred. Gilbert froze, knelt, hunched his shoulders, and tried to resemble one of the black boulders on the beach. It was well that he did, for near the water one of the boulders, by far the largest, came alive and stood up no more than five paces in front of him. The Canadian Indian grunted a word to himself and moved quickly to the trembling canoe. He peered into the canoe, raised a club, and struck at the unseen captive. Gilbert heard the thud—a dull sound, not the crunch of a broken skull. The Canadian Indian immediately bent down as if to examine the captive's bonds.

Gilbert thought quickly in that instant of breathlessness. He knew that one shout might alarm the dancing Indians. They were howling fiendishly now, but it was probable that some of them were not participating in the orgy and would hear a sharp yell from the beach. He had an impulse to run past the guard, to seize one of the more distant canoes, and thus make an escape. The temptation was strong, but he had already considered the disastrous result of such a flight. Only one alternative came to mind. He must kill the guard.

There was little time. While the Indian worked over the canoe Gilbert crept up from behind and drew his machete, a tool he well knew how to wield. And yet it seemed a cumbersome thing, a weapon too heavy to hold in one hand. It seemed to be slipping out of his fingers. He gritted his teeth and grasped the weapon in both hands. It was kill or be

killed, and it was war. Somehow the knowledge overcame his weakness and enabled him to press forward. As Gilbert drew the machete back beside his shoulder the Indian straightened and turned.

There was no shout. For an instant the headless body remained upright, and then collapsed. The head splashed in the shallow water beside the canoe.

The inertia of horror overcame him for another instant, but the continuing howls of the Indians shocked him into action. He was running down the beach before he remembered the captive. Halting, he scanned the brow of the bank, and then ran back to the canoe. The Mohawk was not only alive but conscious. Gilbert cut his bonds, helped him out of the canoe, and supported him in an erect position. The Mohawk was stiff, scarcely capable of moving, but his senses were alert.

"Englishman?" he said.

"Yes. English. But I am going to Quebec. Do you want to come?" He knew there was no choice. The Mohawk could not paddle a canoe against the current, not until the circulation returned to his limbs.

"Quebec?" He was puzzled, and Gilbert quickly explained:

"English ships will come to Quebec. We will meet them there."

"I war chief. We go with you."

"We? Are there more of you?"

The Mohawk war chief nodded. "Some dead." He waved in the direction of the unseen fires and then knelt over the guard's body, fumbling for the dead man's knife. "Some tied in canoes," he said.

Gilbert pressed the knife into the Mohawk's awkward hand. "Cut them loose."

While the Mohawk stumbled and crawled to the nearest canoe Gilbert raced up the beach instead of down. He freed three men. Words of instruction, he soon discovered, were

useless. None of the other captives spoke English. But they understood his signals well enough and began crawling downstream. Gilbert searched all the upstream canoes and then hurried down, overtaking the crawling Mohawks and freeing nine more. The war chief had released two. In the shadows just below the area of firelit water Gilbert helped four men into a canoe and set them adrift. A minute later four more were sprawling in a second canoe. Gilbert towed it into deep water, gave it a shove, and waded ashore to ready the next. When the four men tumbled into the third canoe he sent it downstream after the other. There were only three Mohawks on the beach. Gilbert ran to the hindmost, picked him up and carried him down to the farthest canoe, and then returned for another. The third, the chief with the knife, reached the canoe without help, but none of the Mohawks was capable of holding a paddle when at last they were drifting on the river. Some rubbed their arms and legs and grimaced with the pain of returning circulation while others sprawled on the gunwales, bow and stern, and paddled with their palms as though swimming.

Behind them the Canadian Indians, now clearly visible on the bank, continued to dance in the firelight. Their howls came sharp and awesome over the water. To Gilbert they seemed incarnate devils who would, he knew, single him out for special punishment if ever they were to overtake the fugitives. He knew, also, that presently those devils would require fresh victims, would go to the canoes, would find the Mohawks gone. What then? As Gilbert imagined their anger he regretted his recent pity for these Mohawks, by repute even more cruel than the Indians on the bank. Why, he asked himself, why had he not left them? If he had, he would now be paddling unencumbered toward Wilhelmina. The Canadian Indians, tormenting these Mohawks all night, would never have thought of pursuit. But now? At any moment

they might discover their loss, leap in their canoes, and descend upon the unarmed Mohawks.

It was an hour before the howls faded with distance. Two of the other canoes had one paddler each, but the party chose to keep together, and so drifted with the fourth. In the meantime Gilbert and Atiron, for such was the war chief's name, discussed their predicament. Atiron, it seemed, was grateful. His speaking vocabulary was restricted to perhaps a hundred English words but his understanding was unlimited. From him Gilbert learned that the Canadian Indians were mostly Algonquins, Missisaugoes, and Ottawas, although some hundred-odd Hurons were among them. All hated the Mohawks against whom they had waged wars since the beginning of legendary time.

But it was Atiron's gratitude that encouraged Gilbert. By the time all the Mohawks were paddling Gilbert knew that their loyalty to him was strong. Reason told him that it would endure at least until they were safe aboard the ships at Quebec. Indeed, Atiron professed a wish to repay the debt he owed for his life, and Gilbert was quick to accept the offer:

"Then help me find her."

"A woman?" The chief was puzzled even when Gilbert explained his quest. Atiron could not understand why an Englishman would deliberately venture this far alone—although the necessity to complete the journey was clear enough. There was no turning back now. "Atiron help," the chief promised in a vehement tone amounting to a vow.

And so the party of fifteen Mohawks and one Englishman fled down the Richelieu toward the Saint Lawrence. In spite of their head start they were in danger of being overtaken on the river, and so they landed on the east bank, set their elm bark canoes adrift, and took to the forest, angling north and east toward the Saint Lawrence. For two more days they lived on berries and roots, but when they reached a French

seigniory on the bank of the great river their hungers were satiated. Later their birch bark canoes, wrested from luckless Algonquins, were well stocked with French produce: dried grains and smoked meats. Armed now with muskets, bows, hatchets, and knives, they comprised a formidable company, a venegful, rapacious force that scourged their path. But during the entire journey only two Frenchmen were tortured, and they before Gilbert could restrain the cruel Atiron. At first the Mohawks could not understand Gilbert's abhorrence of their atrocities, but in the end they agreed to leave no trail of blood for the Hurons to follow.

How pitiless they were! thought Gilbert. As they approached Quebec he began to despair of ever finding Wilhelmina alive. If all Indians were as cruel as these Mohawks then she must have suffered much since despatching that birch bark letter to the governor. During the sleepless days of hiding and the long nights of paddling, his hopes turned into anxieties.

When they approached Quebec in early September there were no ships, not even French ships. But if the Mohawks suspected Gilbert of treachery they kept their thoughts to themselves. They owed Gilbert their lives and were prepared to obey Atiron who soon demonstrated his gratitude.

The chief, ascertaining Gilbert's intention of searching the town by night, took the hazardous venture upon himself:

"The French will discover you," Atiron reminded him in the odd mixture of English and Mohawk that Gilbert clarified in his own mind. He had learned few Mohawk words, but somehow Atiron's gestures were eloquent enough: "My brother, you do not speak French."

"But you, my brother, neither do you."

"The Mohawk and Huron languages resemble each other," Atiron explained. "And the Hurons and French are allies. I enter Quebec as a Huron. Describe her to me, this woman

who must be as beautiful as the moon. She will be easy to find among dark Frenchwomen."

"Her hair is black. Straight. She likes to curl it if she can. Her eyes are grey—I think."

Bewildered, Atiron scratched one bald side of his coppery scalp which was divided by a ruff of stiff hair in the middle. His thick fingernails found two or three bristles above his ear and plucked them out. *"Deh-ga-ok-hah,"* he muttered impatiently.

"Yes, her eyes are grey when she looks at the rain clouds, blue when she looks at the blue sky. . . ."

Atiron was still dissatisfied. "When she look at you—what color?"

"I don't know—never did. Never could tell. Sometimes they were happy eyes, sometimes sad. . . ."

Atiron listened attentively. Later he searched the town. Day after day he loitered about the streets, night after night reported that many dark-haired women lived in Quebec. His task was difficult, dangerous. Yet he persevered. In the meantime the Mohawks, ever on the alert for the enemy Indians who frequented the neighborhood, shifted their hiding place up and down and across the river or hunted in the forests.

As for Gilbert, his anxieties deepened into gloom during the interminable days and nights. Wilhelmina, it seemed, was not in Quebec. Then where was she? Still on the Saint John River?

Dressed in the tailored deerskin shirt and the leggings of an unfortunate Algonquin slain by the Mohawks, Gilbert fretted more and more as time went on. He considered an excursion into Acadia, but none of the Mohawks knew the way. They opposed such an enterprise. Here, on the broad waters of the Saint Lawrence, especially below the narrows at Quebec, they could hope to elude the enemy until such time as the English ships arrived. But in Acadia they would be confined to narrow streams which none of them had

travelled. Without a guide they would be lost. Long ago, it seemed, their grandfathers had vanished into that country and had never come back.

Nevertheless Gilbert thought much on his plan during those first weeks of September. He began to hope that the ships would never come, that the Mohawks would be forced to accompany him into Acadia. Already he suspected the first part of the route to be the estuary of a small river flowing out of the south which Atiron imagined to be an ancient war path.

The temptation to follow the stream was great, but he well knew that he would never locate Wilhelmina in so extensive a wilderness. Bitterly he waited and waited, prayed and prayed that Atiron would yet find her in Quebec.

Once, looking down on the lower town from a height across the river, he reached up under his leather shirt and extracted the square of birch bark which he had begged from the governor before leaving Boston. "Autumn," he read. "1689."

That was a year ago. A whole year ago. Much could have happened since then. He studied the missive again, searching for some hitherto unnoticed word that might renew his hope.

"They take me to Quebek after winter," he read. After winter? Why had she written it thus? After winter? It was a vague date. Might it not mean spring, summer, or even this autumn? Then was she still in Acadia?

Chapter 20

In Acadia it was September when the Penobscots came from Quebec. Neither Castine nor his son was among them, but they had strict orders from François to guard her well. Although they waited a week at Meductic they gave her no opportunity to steal a canoe. The Bee was highly prized. The musket they presented to Ka-ka-kos was proof enough of that.

The morning of the departure arrived. The Penobscots came to the wigwam, tore her away from Jem, and dragged her to the beach. While they readied the canoe Jem must have slipped out of the wigwam, for Ah-tum-e-gun came racing after him. The gold seal, habitually worn under but now outside his frilled leather shirt, swung back and forth on the loop of chain. Wilhelmina caught him up, and again pleaded with Ah-tum-e-gun, but her cries had no effect. Indeed the squaw blazed anger, and so Wilhelmina, suffering the despair of final separation, released her son. Kneeling beside him, she told him to mind the squaw, to remember his name, to go to England when he became a man, to present the seal to the king. But the boy only screamed the louder and beat his fists against the squaw's long mantle.

"Jemmy, Jemmy!" she cried, restraining his beating fists. "You must stay with Ah-tum-e-gun. . . ." But he continued to strike the squaw. Whirling him around to face her, Wilhelmina raised her desperate voice to drown his cries. It was then that the squaw, perhaps enraged because the boy preferred his real mother, seized a crooked knife from Ka-ka-kos and twisted a hand in the mother's hair.

Wilhelmina felt the knife slashing the back of her head and knew that her scalp must presently tear away. Yet her two hands, instinctively releasing Jem and grasping the

squaw's wrists, had the strength to prevent the knife from scoring a circle around her scalp. She called to the Penobscots for protection, but none dared offend the Malisetes. Through the hot blood that trickled into her eyes she saw the squaw's knee thrusting Jem aside. He was screaming, but his screams were drowned in the clamor of the crowding squaws and braves. Striving to push the knife higher, she lost both courage and strength. She had so little will to live. What was left in life for her? Nothing. Nothing but time and despair. A gathering faintness numbed her sense until she scarcely felt the squaw's teeth in her arm. The shouts on all sides faded as if with distance.

For a moment she thought that she would faint, but presently the very excitement of the onlookers told her that to them the outcome of the contest was still doubtful. They might spare her if she triumphed over the squaw. She took heart, redoubled her efforts, felt the tortured muscles of her arms obeying her cruel will. It seemed that the knife was slowly but assuredly lifting out of her hair. She clenched her teeth, exerted all her might, and forced the knife higher. There followed an eternity of gruelling effort, but the knife would move no higher. At last, as her strength weakened, she felt the point of the knife again. Desperately, for there seemed no other course, she released the squaw's wrist and with both hands clawed down at the black eyes. She felt teeth tearing out of her arm, heard steel grating against her skull, saw the tracks of her fingernails turning crimson on the squaw's face. Ah-tum-e-gun staggered back. In her right hand was the bloody knife, in her left a hank of sticky hair cut off near the roots. A piece of red flesh the size of an ear swung at the end of one strand. For Wilhelmina there was no pain at first, no sense of feeling save the dread that comes of reviving hope. She pushed at the scarred face, sent the squaw lurching backwards to trip over a kettle, and rushed to keep the advantage. The squaw almost regained her bal-

ance, but another push sent her sprawling to the edge of the river. Her head struck a rock in the shallow water.

Heedless of the shouting behind her. Wilhelmina stared down at the squaw. The brown fingers relaxed to let the knife sink to the bottom. Blood discolored a wisp of current. The knife began to gleam. Wilhelmina bent down, picked it up, and knelt over that bleeding face. The squaw was breathing, her ears under water, her nose and mouth just above the surface.

Wilhelmina held the trembling knife against the pulsing throat in readiness for the squaw's recovery. Naked legs of men and the long mantles of squaws were all about her. She understood their shouts. She must kill Ah-tum-e-gun. *"Niss! Nissok!"*

Now that her fury had abated, now that Jem was to the forefront of her mind again, she could think clearly. The squaw would be ungrateful for mercy, would resume the struggle if permitted to recover, would eventually triumph over one who hesitated to kill. And the Malisete braves? They would, if Ah-tum-e-gun died, avenge her death. Was there no hope then? No hope for Jem? Might they not kill him too? Of them all only Ah-tum-e-gun wanted him. Only Ah-tum-e-gun would care for him. And so this treacherous squaw must live. Wilhelmina shuddered and threw the knife far out into the stream.

The shouting waned to a murmur. Squaws and braves alike stood in awe for a moment and then roared disgust and ridicule.

A raving squaw jerked her around, pushed her down upon Ah-tum-e-gun, and demonstrated how to strangle the unconscious woman. Wilhelmina let her hands be placed on the pulsing throat, but she could not squeeze—not when Jem's life might depend on Ah-tum-e-gun.

Wilhelmina looked at Ka-ka-kos and knew the boy's fate if Ah-tum-e-gun died. Silent and grim, he would own Jem

to do with as he pleased. At best he would let the boy live. At worst. . . . She could not bear the thought. How cruel he was! How could he stand there and watch his mate die? But of course! It was the Malisete custom. He could not interfere in a fight between two squaws. But afterwards? Yes, even if the Penobscots claimed her, he would have Jem. She decided to spare the squaw.

Ah-tum-e-gun was stirring when the fear of death, the fear of never knowing how Jem fared in the future, inspired Wilhelmina with a will to live. Was there no way? No way to save herself for a distant day when she might be able to help him? She looked down at Ah-tum-e-gun, saw the dark eyes blinking, and then it came to her:

She need only elude the squaw. Ah-tum-e-gun, if she could, would kill her on recovery—but there was the Penobscot canoe. The Penobscots had come for her. The Malisetes would scarcely interfere with them. Neither of these allied tribes would offend the other. Wilhelmina choked the squaw, subduing her for another moment. She commanded silence, explained what she would do. Ka-ka-kos looked much relieved. He spoke to them all, and all agreed.

The Penobscots waded ankle deep, took their places in the floating canoe, and held it in readiness for a swift departure. After releasing the squaw, Wilhelmina waded out and climbed into the canoe. The paddles thrust at the gravel bottom. The canoe sped out on the river.

But there was no song of exultation in her heart. Above the exchange of farewells she heard only the wail of one small voice. He was at the water's edge. And then she was calling to him, promising to return. He waved. It was as if he believed she would return. He was still waving from Ah-tum-e-gun's arms when, her vision blurring, she saw him for the last time. The curve of the shore obstructed her view before she could look again.

Not until that evening was she fully conscious of the throb-

bing pain in her head, and not until the next morning was she sufficiently in command of herself to bathe the clotted blood from her hair. The wound smarted to the touch, but during the journey upstream it gradually healed. After the Penobscots portaged around the Grand Falls she felt only a continual itching. That such a wound must leave a conspicuous scar did not trouble her now. Years ago she would have fretted, would have pondered how to conceal it with her hair, but now she had no thought of her appearance. Too much misery filled her days and nights. Indeed even the prospect of soon facing François Castine in Quebec was all but forgotten as she worried about Jem. Had he understood her? And if he really had, might he not forget? Day by day the torment increased until at last she could no longer believe that he would remember her words. Four years old! Anguish seized her as she tried to recall her own early childhood and failed. Would it be the same with Jem, hazy recollections of faces only? And even if he did remember, would he heed? No. He would have no wish to seek out his own people. But why, she asked herself now, why did she draw that conclusion? Was it because . . . ? Yes, it was even so. She no longer dreamed of England herself. At some time during the past year her dreams had changed. England seemed foreign, unattainable. It would be enough to escape these savages, to live in one of the frontier settlements. How strange that so meager a refuge would satisfy her now!

Above Grand Falls the way trended north-west for two days, then west a day, and then south-west. The river divided often and dwindled. The Penobscots stowed their paddles, cut long slender poles, and pushed upstream.

"*Ta Kebek?*" she asked one evening after calling them to the pot of boiled corn. How many days to Quebec? "*Toni kase kisok-ok?*"

"*Na-nu-uk.*" Five.

Five days! The thought disturbed her. In five days she

would meet François, the half-breed whom even these savages feared. What was it that Mal-ko-kee had said a year ago? Nothing. He had evaded her question: "Is François so bad?" The memory frightened her, and she tried to relieve her mind by thinking about Mal-ko-kee. But beyond recalling that he had died during the attack on Fort Royal, she could not dwell on him. She was too near Quebec and François.

In the morning the leader of the party, one Mus-quash by name, chose the lesser of the two branches. It led them west until it petered out to a mere brook. The landing, a ledge of rock where no trees grew, was well marked, for besides an abandoned wigwam and the black ashes of campfires there were some ten or twelve canoes at the edge of the forest.

The Penobscots overturned their own canoe on the ledge marking the start of the portage and shouldered their muskets. Although it was the custom for a squaw to follow, the braves were suspicious of her—and rightly so. They bade her lead the way. She struggled into the heavy pack, adjusted the burden-strap, and started along the ancient trail.

She hurried along, hoping to outdistance the Penobscots and so to hide and let them pass. The attempt was futile. Unburdened except for muskets, powder horns and pouches, they easily kept pace. Yet the canoes back there at the landing possessed her mind until the trail ended suddenly on the bank of another stream, the headwater of the Etchemin or Gut-string River. Then, observing another canoe, she realized that even if she escaped during the night, even if she found and broke all the canoes on the Wool-us-took landing, the Penobscots could easily portage this canoe and so overtake her long before she reached Meductic. She relinquished the plan and set about preparing the evening meal. Nevertheless she took note of the landmarks so that, if ever the opportunity occurred, she could locate this portage. It was opposite a granite hill that looked like nothing so much as

the top of an Indian's shaven head—bare except for a clump of pines on the summit.

From downstream on the following morning it looked the same, but within an hour it was lost among the others. She heeded the brooks now, for if ever she were to retrace her way she must choose the correct branch. During the descent they passed no great tributaries except on the last day when one large stream flowed in from the west. The general trend of the Etchemin, she observed when at last they neared the Saint Lawrence, was north-west.

"Where is Quebec?" she asked above the roar of cataracts after they had portaged to the mouth of the stream and paddled out upon the Saint Lawrence. Almost immediately she saw the town huddling under a great promontory some distance down and across the broad river. Above the town a small fort squatted on the very edge of the rock mass, and beyond it the spires of four great buildings pointed at the clouds.

The Penobscots, instead of drifting down with the current to Quebec, paddled directly across the river toward a row of canoes on the narrow beach between river and cliff.

"Where are we going?" she demanded of Mus-quash when, after they crossed and landed at the foot of a high escarpment, he ordered her to carry the pack up the steep path.

"Lorette."

Lorette. The "r" in the name suggested a village of French origin. She struggled up the rocky path and caught her breath at the top. A trail led into the forest.

Mus-quash pointed into the hardwoods. *"Losa ni,"* he ordered. *"Lorett-ak."* Go that way. To Lorette.

Momentarily expecting to see a French village, Wilhelmina plodded along the trail, but within the hour she suspected the truth. Lorette was an Indian village. Mus-quash, walking behind her and answering her questions, confirmed her suspicion and explained that the remnant of the once power-

ful Huron tribes, after a long war with the Iroquois, had sought refuge near Quebec. Although friends of the Abenakis, they spoke a strange language similar to that of the Mohawk and other Iroquoian tribes.

"François Castine?" she interrupted uneasily. "Is he at Lorette?"

"*O'hoo,*" Mus-quash grunted. Yes. Irritated by her interruption, he volunteered no further information even though she prompted him from time to time. "*Tabat!*" he snapped at last. Shut up! Yet he spoke to the braves behind him, Wilhelmian observed. Listening, she heard her own name linked with François. They were congratulating themselves on the success of their mission to Meductic. François, it seemed, had threatened reprisal if they failed. Their obvious relief, now that they were approaching Lorette with their charge, alarmed Wilhelmina moment by moment. What manner of savage was this François, this war chief whom even his own warriors feared? Her paces shortened, but Mus-quash drove her on.

It was just after she smelled the garbage and smoke of the village that three strange braves appeared ahead of them on the trail. They halted at a distance. Even before they spoke Wilhelmina thought them Hurons, for unlike the partially shaven scalps of the Abenakis their heads were covered with bristly growths of hair, and one of them wore rolls above his ears.

"*Ho!*" The leader raised an arm in salute and approached warily. "*Quo-ye?*"

Mus-quash seemed to understand Huron, for he pushed Wilhelmina aside and advanced to meet the stranger. "*Ya-tor-o,*" he responded, whereupon the two leaders immediately met and engaged in a conversation as unintelligible to Wilhelmina as it was to the Penobscots who, after the Hurons passed by, demanded the news from Mus-quash. He told them that Frontenac, the governor of Quebec, was attending

a congress of the western tribes. The Huron village, since most of the warriors including the Abenakis had gone with him to Montreal, was almost deserted.

The Penobscots were depressed, for to them the news meant that no feast awaited their arrival at Lorette. They would have to guard François Castine's woman, the Bee who might fly away at any hour, until his return. But Wilhelmina was heartened, for to her the news meant a reprieve.

As a consequence, after trudging the last mile to Lorette, she showed no reluctance to enter the gate. The village itself was no larger than Meductic, but it differed in one respect: All the dwellings, some twenty Huron longhouses and as many Abenaki wigwams, were enclosed within the stockade. It was into one of the wigwams that Mus-quash led Wilhelmina.

His squaw, Nona-sis, a Passamaquoddy of about seventeen, greeted him with the unabashed passion of long separation. Wilhelmina would have crawled outside the wigwam, but Mus-quash, mistaking her discretion for trickery, forbade her exit. To make sure she did not escape he tied her wrists and ankles, and only afterwards, when at last he lay exhausted on the moose skins, told his tireless squaw to release her. The Passamaquoddy girl undid the knots, hung the leather thongs on the wigwam poles, and invited Wilhelmina to help herself from the pot.

It was a mixture of fish and ground corn, no welcome change of diet for Wilhelmina. But because she was both hungry and anxious to please the squaw, she ate heartily while Nona-sis watched her closely. Once Nona-sis, cupping her own small breast in her brown hand, enviously regarded the fullness under Wilhelmina's smock:

"François, he will call you 'Woola-nona.' "

"When does François return?"

"The feast at Montreal lasts twelve more days. It is a big *pow-waw.*"

Twelve days, she thought, cringing within herself. Only twelve days of reprieve. And then she would be expected to greet François as Nona-sis had greeted Mus-quash. She swallowed the sticky lump of fish and meal and thereafter brooded in silence. Now and again she determined to inquire further, but the dread of crystallizing her suspicions about François—suspicions of cruelty, malformation, ugliness, disease or whatever had prevented him thus far from winning a squaw—was too abject to overcome. It was better to hope that he was not so repulsive as she imagined.

With night came despair. Tossing on her part of the mattress, she could not suppress those insistent questions. Why, in spite of his reputation as a war chief, had François taken no squaw? Why had François not come to Meductic himself? His father had hinted that she was strong enough for François. Why must his squaw be so strong?

She was still sleepless when just before dawn a sweating Huron burst into the village and created a bedlam of excitement. He had run all the way from Quebec. The news, when at last Mus-quash interpreted the Huron's words to the Penobscots, encouraged her at first, for not only the governor but also his soldiers were absent from Quebec. It might mean that the town would surrender immediately.

"How many ships?" she demanded after Mus-quash told the Penobscots that the English had already sailed up the Saint Lawrence as far as Tadoussac. The answer heartened her still more. Thirty or forty ships! And only thirty or forty French soldiers had been left to garrison the town!

"Then Quebec will fall?" She could not hide her eagerness. English ships? She might yet escape! She had only to flee this Huron fort, run the five or six miles to the river, steal a canoe, and paddle down to the ships.

"Yes," Mus-quash admitted reluctantly. "Quebec will surrender when so many ships come."

Bestirred with the hope of succor, Wilhelmina prompted

him until his patience came to an end. He bade her return to the wigwam, warned her that an attempt to escape would result only in punishment.

She obeyed, but his threat scarcely frightened her. Mus-quash might punish her mildly, but he would not dare to injure her body. He was too respectful of François Castine. Respectful? No, she decided when instead of sleeping be-side Nona-sis that night he stretched across the wigwam doorway. Not exactly respectful. But fearful. Why was he so uneasy? So watchful? Staring at him in the dim light of the low fire, she lost heart. He would never fall asleep.

She must have slept herself, for on waking in the morning the heat of the cooking fire was smarting her face. Mus-squash was eating out of a wooden bowl, scooping up the mash in his fingers and tilting his head back to swallow. She listened for the sound of distant guns that would announce the arrival of the English ships at Quebec.

"The ships? Not yet."

During the day she began to doubt that the ships would really come. Her questions provoked Mus-quash to anger, and that night and thereafter he bound her wrist to his squaw's.

Wilhelmina despaired, for it seemed that Frontenac, now hurrying down with his troops and Indians from Montreal, would reach Quebec before the English ships. Another day proved her fears well founded. Frontenac had come, and with him some two thousand savages to defend the town. By tonight the French troops would arrive from Montreal. The English ships? Perhaps tomorrow morning.

That night, expecting Francois at any minute, she chewed the leather band at her wrist and for another hour watched her apparently sleeping captor. But he was not sleeping. At the first rustle of the bough mattress under her hands and knees he sprang across the wigwam, and seizing her wrist, felt the wet end of the leather band.

"*Kamo-jil*" He kicked Nona-sis awake, and still holding Wilhelmina by the wrist, belabored his squaw with punishing blows. He would, he threatened, teach Little Teat to sleep lightly, and as for the Bee he would leave her to François.

"Yes," cried Nona-sis in her anger. "You had better leave her to Plansoe! You coward! *Mena-dae!*" The taunt insensed Mus-quash. He dealt Wilhelmina one kick and then expended his fury on Nona-sis who submitted meekly long before he desisted. In the morning he examined the bruise on Wilhelmina's arm and seemed to swear under his breath. He told Nona-sis to rub the bruise with sarsaparilla and bear grease.

"I hate him," Nona-sis told Wilhelmina when they were alone. "Look at me." Her brown skin was mottled with black bruises. "I hope François kills him." After studying Wilhelmina for a moment Nona-sis added: "Tonight I help you run away. Then François will kill him."

Astonished, Wilhelmina could not reply for a moment. The young squaw was so changeable that to confide the planned route of escape might be a mistake. Nona-sis might betray her, and so Wilhelmina probed into the Passamaquoddy's thoughts. "And would you become the squaw of François?"

"No!" Nona-sis seemed horrified. "François is brave, but his squaws. . . . They do not live." She watched Wilhelmina's eyes for a moment and then: "I go with you."

"But where?"

"To the English ships."

So even Nona-sis guessed her mind. But the squaw's deduction was not remarkable, for there was no other refuge. "But after that? Where would you go? To your people?"

The Passamaquoddy looked downcast. "No. It cannot be. Plansoe, he would follow and punish. He is a great chief. My people, they are few. I cannot go to them." Discouraged

and perhaps frightened, she appeared to relinquish the idea. Indeed during those next few days while musketry and cannonading came up on the wind she watched Wilhelmina as closely as did Mus-quash. It was as if she preferred life with Mus-quash to the only alternative—death.

Chapter 21

Of the four Penobscots who had brought her to Lorette only Mus-quash remained in the Huron fort, but now and again one of them returned from Quebec with news of the siege. François, Wilhelmina learned, would come for her as soon as the fighting ended, but for the present he preferred to command his braves who, in conjunction with the Hurons, had repulsed a landing of New England militia. The half-breed had taken nine scalps, but a Huron chief had taken eleven, and François was determined to surpass him.

The news disgruntled Mus-quash, for it meant no end to his sleepless nights. He beat his squaw and scolded the Huron and Abenaki children who occasionally disturbed his daytime naps. But he was always civil to the braves and old men who occasionally visited the wigwam. To one of them, a coughing Huron who seemed to have a sore throat, Mus-quash was particularly friendly one evening. There was a reason, of course. The Huron smelled of rum.

Remembering how some of the Indians had been crazed by rum at Cocheco, Wilhelmina took alarm when the Huron, after sitting down on the bough mattress and crossing his

legs, extracted an earthen bottle from beneath the loose blanket that covered his head and body. In the light of the fire he looked sleepy. His eyelids drooped so that he must tilt his head back to look about the wigwam. And yet, Wilhelmina thought, he seemed more interested in herself and Nona-sis than in Mus-quash. The men spoke in Huron, Mus-quash in a normal tone, the stranger in a hoarse whisper.

Watching him suck from the bottle, Wilhelmina had the impression that he was quite ill, for he kept adjusting the red blanket about his head and shoulders.

Of a sudden Wilhelmina was staring at the bottle—at the word scratched upon its brown surface. Her heart seemed to stop. For a moment she could not breathe, could only sit there and stare at the bottle. Her own name—Mina. She was sure of it now. Although the stranger put the bottle in the Penobscot's hands so that other scratches appeared, she knew that the words were intended for her. And who would call her Mina? Who in all America? Who but Gilbert? In astonishment she stared at the stranger who seemed to nod his head and lower one eyelid more than the other. His fingers touched his lips as if to warn her against outcries.

But it was her shock rather than his gesture that kept her silent after that first gasp for breath. And then wild expectancy rendered her incapable of speaking. She could only stare at the bottle which the stranger, after rescuing it from Mus-quash, revolved slowly in the wrong direction for easy reading.

She leaned forward, spelling the words backwards on silent lips and rearranging them in her mind: "Mina. Watch him hide pouch. Gil."

Lost in excitement she did not so much as wonder if Nona-sis were watching her. If she had been capable of worrying, of observing anything but the stranger's actions, she would have noticed that both Mus-quash and his squaw were intent on the bottle in the stranger's left hand—not on the

movement of his blanket as he appeared to scratch himself between his legs.

And now he gave the bottle to Mus-quash who drained it. The stranger whispered again in so hoarse a voice that only his gestures could have had meaning. But Mus-quash seemed to understand, for he replied at low breath and surrendered the empty bottle.

Wilhelmina did not need to understand the language to guess that the stranger would return with more rum, and indeed even that assumption was lost among the thoughts that churned in her mind. Chief of these thoughts was this: Gilbert was near. It gained prominence over her other thoughts, but it was so incredible that she had to put the thought into words and repeat them over and over before she could believe the message on the bottle. She was as unaware of her trembling as of the throbbing of her heart until, minutes after the stranger went, Nona-sis tossed her a blanket and told her to creep nearer the fire.

She accepted the blanket, and pretending that the smoke troubled her eyes, manoeuvered to the place where the stranger had sat. In a moment she felt the pouch. Squeezing it, she heard it crackle. Yes, even as she had hoped, it was a letter from Gilbert. But she could not open the pouch yet.

All night, enduring the tortures of expectation, she clung to the pouch. At times, dreading that she had fallen asleep and dreamed it all, she squeezed the leather pouch against her ear. It still crackled, though less noisily. Toward dawn, crushed a hundred times against her ear, it no longer crackled. She was sure now. There was a message in the pouch. But the hard object? What could it be? Shaped like a nail, it bent easily.

At the first opportunity she opened the pouch and plucked out a sheet of parchment. If Nona-sis and Mus-quash had entered at that moment Wilhelmina would not have heard

them. The parchment was folded and refolded. Opening it she found one side blank, the other littered with words:

> Dearest my beloved Mina, if it is really you, know I wait in trembling for the great tidings, hoping it is true. Would I were able to write what comes to my lips, but the dearth of paper forbids. Heed only I love you and this: The messenger trust, and give yourself and him not away. He is Aitron, a petty war chief of the Five Nations Indians, and speaks English. Not ill at all, he pretends hoarseness as the Huron dialect comes hard to him, he being a Mohawk and must disguise his tongue and hide his hair lest all be found out. We come for you when it is wise. Be ready all hours, but night is best. The Canadian Indians throng the river in canoes by day, keeping us to the ships, but by night they scarce tell us from Hurons in our canoes. Find in the pouch a sliver of lead for writing on the reverse side and know I love you. Gilbert.

That was all. The last words, squeezed together at the bottom of the parchment, were scarcely legible. But their very contraction told her that only space had kept him from telling her more. She read the message again and again, digesting every phrase and wishing the words would continue on and on.

The day seemed endless. A thousand times she prayed that it would be her last day in the Huron village, a thousand times concluded that Gilbert would not come for her tonight. Else why had he asked her to reply? It could only mean that Atiron meant to return again. They were waiting for an opportune hour.

In odd moments during that interminable day she attempted to write. But the sliver of lead punched holes in the parchment, for there was nothing in the wigwam smooth enough to use as backing. In the end she was forced to blunt

the point and to scrawl in large printed characters. As a consequence her reply was brief:

GILBERT MY DARLING DO TAKE CARE. I WAIT ANKSHUS LEST YOU COME RASH. AM TIED AT NIGHT IN WIGWAM.

There was no room to sign her name. She turned the parchment over. In silvery letters she superimposed on his message her uppermost thought:

DO NOT COME HERE Y'SELF. I CAN FIND SHIP IF MOHOK HELP. BID HIM FETCH RUM FOR MUSQUAS AND WIFE.

There was still no space for her signature. She folded the parchment, tucked it into the pouch, and hid it where she had found it—and just in time, for rain, pattering on the wigwam, drove Nona-sis and Mus-quash inside for shelter. Darkness fell early, and so to Wilhelmina it seemed that the Mohawk would never come. When at last a fit of coughing announced his approach she was emotionally spent, so spent that she slept well after he was gone. Until she awoke to the sound of rain it did not occur to her that Gilbert might have sent a second letter, and perhaps it was just as well. Otherwise she would not have slept. But when she found another pouch she overcame her compulsion to read it in full view of Mus-quash and Nona-sis who were loath to venture out into the rain. It was mid-afternoon before she dared so much as extract it from the pouch, and it was dusk before she managed to read the last paragraphs:

But Phips is low on provisions and fearful of an early freeze up, and so he considers lifting the siege. It means, Dearest, that the ships might sail without us if we delay too long, and also, according to Atiron, the Canadian Indians will overrun the village and make our task the risk-

ier. And so, Mina, it must be tomorrow night, or failing that, the next.

Now here is the scheme. Your captor will drink himself asleep (that is what Atiron hopes) and so you and Atiron will steal to the gate. I will be near to show the path. But you must run and not speak. Can you run like always? The path leads to the river where will be canoes on the shore and some Mohawks ready. Be not afraid if you hear steps behind you, for it will be us. Keep running as fast as you can.

Atiron goes to the Huron village tomorrow night, but if too many Canadian Indians are on the river or in the village you must stay another day. But my Beloved, do not worry, and do believe we come soon or late. Be ready at all times.

Phips blesses our undertaking and supplies us with rum, and Mina, do you remember the officer of Kirke's Lambs, Captain Vetch? He is here aboard the *Six Friends* with eight of his Lambs and wants to make up to you. Says he repents for wrongs done you and blames Judge Jeffreys for the family's misfortune, he himself being a mere soldier of duty. To put it briefly, he says Roebury is to be returned to you. The king, it seems, advised him to that effect if you could be found, and he is trying to find you. He thinks, as I thought till late, you are in the French town. Tho he is trying to ransom you from Gov. Frontenac, I do not trust him altogether and deem it wise to tell him nothing. I do not think he would dare harm you on an English ship, but it will be unpleasant company during the voyage back to Boston. I am free, so he says, to go home too.

But more of this later, My Beloved. I scarce can wait until tomorrow night when we come for you. . . .

There was more, three lines more. But Wilhelmina was

never to read them. A footstep warned her of Mus-quash's return. She buried the parchment in the mattress and sat upon the hiding place.

Tomorrow night! But the letter had come last night! Tonight then! Tonight she would escape! Already day was ending. In a few hours. . . . But to anticipate the reunion would be to exult and so betray herself. Yes, even now as Mus-quash scowled she found herself returning a smile. With a great effort she transformed the smile into a frown, and frowning, tried to concentrate on the gate, the path, and how swiftly she would run the five miles to the river. What if she lost her way? What if Gilbert, running behind her, were overtaken by the Hurons? What if, on reaching the river, the canoes were gone? Thus Wilhelmina subdued her bursting excitement, thus kept her secret from Mus-quash and Nona-sis.

Later, hearing an exchange of greetings in the compound, Wilhelmina realized that the Penobscots and Hurons were returning from Quebec. At first, quivering with the uncertainty of it, she suspected that the English had lifted the siege, but presently she understood that the Indians had returned to their wigwams and longhouses merely because of the rain.

The wigwam darkened. To hide her agitation she busied herself by rearranging the boughs of the mattress, poking at the fire, and fanning the smoke up the chimney-vent. The fire tonight was unusually smoky. Raindrops fell through the vent, sizzled on the hot stones encircling the fire, wet the fuel, and turned into steam. Gazing at the spiralling smoke, Wilhelmina took sudden fright. Her hands! They were grimy from poking the fire. And her face! How smoky it must be!

Heedless of Nona-sis who objected too late, she washed her face over the water pail as best she could before Mus-quash pulled her hair. He dragged her back to her own part

of the mattress, scolded her with vehemence, and sent Nona-sis for fresh water.

More conscious of her expected meeting with Gilbert than of Mus-quash's present scrutiny, Wilhelmina immediately heated the comb that she shared with Nona-sis. Made of heavy brass teeth set in oak, it probably had cost Mus-quash a prime beaver skin; but Wilhelmina, disregarding his frown, ran the prized comb through the flames before doing her hair. The teeth irritated the scar at the back of her head.

"Oh Gill" she muttered to herself. "What will you think of me now?"

She felt the bald spot and took a breath only after deciding that Gilbert would not easily discover the scar. Her hair covered it well enough. But her hair itself? So straight and lank! And her skin? So brown! For a moment she trembled at the thought of meeting him, but almost immediately she could hope that he would not be too disappointed in her. "Oh Gil!" she tried to reassure herself. "You've come so far—all the way from Jamaica! Surely you do love me! Surely you won't mind!" Nevertheless she dug at her nails with a tooth of the comb until Atiron appeared in the doorway.

"Ho," he grunted, grinning as if sure of the welcome that Mus-quash eagerly extended:

"Ya-tor-o."

Wilhelmina did not understand the remainder of the invitation, but she observed that Mus-quash fancied the rum rather than the visitor, for he did not so much as offer Atiron a dry blanket. She also observed that the rum was stronger than on the previous night. Mus-quash coughed on the first swallow, and then, as if ashamed of himself, took another gulp to demonstrate his manliness. Stoically he stifled his compulsion to cough again, but a moment later when Atiron pressed him to drink more he refused, uncrossed his legs, and reeled across the wigwam to confront Nona-sis and Wilhelmina. He bade them sit back to back and lock their arms

about each other's waists. Wilhelmina found herself facing the wall of the wigwam, felt leather thongs wrapping and knotting about her wrists. Her shoulders ached with the strain. Then Mus-quash knelt and tied the squaw's wrists together in front of Wilhelmina's stomach. Neither cried out with the pain—Nona-sis because she knew Mus-quash would beat her, Wilhelmina because she feared that a disturbance would attract Hurons who would help drink the rum. She reasoned that Gilbert had read her message and that Atiron had brought enough rum for his purpose, but the thought of interference was uppermost in her mind until, managing to look over her shoulder, she saw that Mus-quash was lying flat on his stomach and that Atiron was grinning at Nona-sis. Wilhelmina was startled when the squaw exclaimed:

"Wul-a-de-sis! Ma-guil" Little dish! A Mohawk!

In alarm Wilhelmina had a vision of the squaw calling for help. One yell would arouse the Hurons in the longhouses, the Abenakis in the wigwams. But even as she refuted the squaw Wilhelmina saw why Nona-sis had guessed the truth: A stick in the mattress had caught Atiron's blanket as he crawled and had pulled it away from his head to reveal a narrow brush of erect bristles running the length of the otherwise bald scalp—instead of the bushy rolls of hair and feathers worn by a Huron.

Expecting Nona-sis to scream, Wilhelmina was paralyzed with fear. If time had allowed she might have recovered and thought to win the squaw's confidence; but in that instant of extreme disappointment, in that instant when it seemed that the plot would fail, she was incapable of thought. And yet she had impressions. One was that Atiron did not realize his head was exposed, for he was still grinning and creeping forward. There! The blanket fell from his shoulders! He seemed drunk. Rum slopped from the neck of the bottle that he dragged in one hand.

Nona-sis must have been sure he was drunk, for instead

of screaming she was offering herself to him and asking him to take her away from Mus-quash. Atiron kept coming. He did not understand her language. And Nona-sis was afraid that he would kill her if she yelled.

Wilhelmina shook off her paralysis: "Nona-sis—you want to go with him? To his country?"

"Yes. But he does not know that. I think he will kill me. Does he come for you?"

Wilhelmina had no time to reply, for although Atiron had drunk too much rum, he was far from collapsing. His legs were gathering beneath him as if for a sudden spring. Quickly Wilhelmina spoke in English: "No! She will not call out! She wants to go with us—with you!"

Atiron seemed much relieved. It was as if he had been afraid the squaw would scream. "She make noise? No?"

"No. She will come quietly. She hates Mus-quash."

Nona-sis must have been surprised to hear the unintelligible conversation, but Wilhelmina could not see her face. Perhaps Nona-sis smiled at Atiron, for he immediately stood up and drew his knife as he came near. In an instant the thongs were cut. In another instant Wilhelmina was at the doorway, looking out into the night. Rain pelted noisily on the wigwam, ran down the bark and dripped on her head and shoulders. Presently her eyes adjusted themselves to the darkness, and she discerned the outlines of other wigwams and the saw-toothed rim of the stockade.

"Nobody about," she whispered over her shoulder. Hearing no answer, she withdrew into the wigwam and turned. At first she felt impatience with, and then contempt for Nona-sis and Atiron; but her revulsion at the untimely embrace was immediately obliterated by another revolting sight: Mus-quash's head was planted upright on the mattress at a little distance from his quivering body. His own knife protruded from his back. And now Nona-sis leaped erect, exposing the Mohawk who seemed dissatisfied with that brief

moment of passion, for he merely sat upright and beckoned to the squaw. Nona-sis found the rum bottle, and as if afraid that the Mohawk would drink the remnant and so jeopardize their escape, broke it upon a fireplace stone. The dazzling flames leaped high as Nona-sis bent over Mus-quash's body and plucked the knife from his back. The Mohawk rolled to his feet and seized the severed head by its scalp-lock.

Cringing, Wilhelmina backed through the doorway and reeled away from the blinding glare. For a moment the horror of it numbed her senses, but by the time her eyes made out the shapes of wigwams and longhouses she smelled the Mohawk's breath over her shoulder. Glancing back she saw his silhouette against the brilliant doorway. The head hung from his hand.

Nona-sis was already leading the way. They followed her behind a row of wigwams and then among the vague shapes of the longhouses. They were about to slink around the end of the largest building when Nona-sis spread her arms wide, stopping them just as the door flap was pushed aside to reveal the shape of a man against the glow of the interior. They halted, but the Huron did not stir from the doorway. There was the sound of rain only, and then the Huron retired behind the door flap. But now a dog whined and trotted beside the Mohawk as Nona-sis led them toward the gate. The squaw hissed at the dog, but without effect. Indeed another dog, then several appeared from nowhere and savagely contended for positions near the Mohawk's trophy. Their snarls would soon alarm the sleeping Hurons.

"Tell him," Nona-sis whispered in Abenaki. "Tell him to throw that head away."

Comprehension came to the Mohawk as quickly as to Wilhelmina, for all at once the head was on his knee. There was no flash of his knife, but it must have cut a circle around the topknot, for now Atiron gripped the tuft of hair, plunged

the head toward the ground, and jerked suddenly upward. A sound like that of a cork pulled from a bottle was followed by a dull thud as the head rolled on the ground. The dogs were upon it in an instant, growling ferociously. Nona-sis kicked them away, picked up the head and bowled it toward the far end of the compound. The dogs disappeared. But already the doorways of several longhouses were aglow. Above the growls and snarls of fighting dogs Wilhelmina heard a shout of alarm. The shout must have sobered the Mohawk, for he kept pace with Wilhelmina as they ran after Nona-sis. They overtook her at the gate.

While the uproar in the village swelled with the pounding of feet, Wilhelmina fumbled with the bar and quietly helped to lower it to the ground. She knew that the Hurons were congregating toward the dogs, not toward the gate, but presently they would discover the head and guess the route of the fugitives. And yet neither the recent horror nor the present fear of pursuit was among her major emotions. For Gilbert must be near. In a moment she would be in his arms. But no! What had he told her in his letter? She was to run! She was to run along the trail, to race ahead of him! But he? Was he to remain behind with Atiron? Terror overcame her. The gate was swinging open, but her body seemed incapable of motion, her moccasins frozen to the ground. In imagination she saw Gilbert helping Atiron along the trail. It was what Gilbert had intended to do although he had not told her that the Mohawk might become intoxicated. Without conscious thought she realized that even if she kept ahead of the pursuers Gilbert might be overtaken.

And now Nona-sis was rushing through the gateway. A man rose up beyond the gate and opened his arms as if to embrace the squaw who avoided him and vanished in the darkness.

"Mina!" It was a breathless word as if gasped at the end

of a violent struggle, but Wilhelmina recognized her name if not that voice. She ran forward.

"Gilbert! Gilbert!"

Chapter 22

GILBERT heard the cry and opened his arms in time to catch a woman who must be Wilhelmina in spite of the force with which her strong arms clung to his neck. He felt damp hair against his lips, a tense body trembling in his arms. In that first instant of thankfulness he heard nothing but the pounding of their hearts, not even the clamor in the village. It was Atiron, hissing in his ear, that startled him into full awareness of their situation.

"Hurry!" Gilbert urged in a whisper, thrusting her upon Atiron who gripped her wrist. "Run!"

Gilbert sprang to the gateway, found the bar, and dragged it outside. None of the Hurons or Abenakis was in sight, but shouts and pounding feet told him that within seconds they would be upon him. He slammed the gate and propped the bar against it. Hoping that the prop would confine the pursuers for a minute, he jammed it tight and then ran through the clearing toward the path. It was darker in the forest, but during the last hour he had paced back and forth along the first section of the path and he knew its every twist. Hurrying along, he overtook Atiron.

"Is she ahead?" demanded Gilbert, knowing that she must be, yet needing reassurance.

"Gone," the Mohawk grunted. "Fly like bat." He was not yet himself, but the sweat of exertion would soon restore his physical powers.

Gilbert urged him to a greater effort, telling him that the Hurons and Abenakis were already on the trail, as indeed they were when another minute had elapsed.

The path led uphill through hardwoods, but after a tortuous mile it entered a grove of spruces. There Gilbert stopped to listen. He heard Atiron's footsteps beating on the ground and raindrops dripping from the dense boughs of the trees. Yes, he had time to fell the spruce tree. He located it after a few bounds, picked up the axe, and swung heavily at the white notches already cut deep in the bole. At the fourth blow the tree creaked, at the fifth swayed. He struck again and then pushed. There was a hissing of branches and a resounding crash behind him as he hurried along the path to the next blazed tree. Within seconds it too was creaking, then toppling back along the trail. Its boughs would scarcely delay the pursuers for long, perhaps not so long as the chopping delayed him, for the Indians would worm into the flanking thickets. Yet even a brief delay might mean the difference between escape and recapture for Wilhelmina, might mean that even Atiron would reach the canoes.

After racing to the third tree, Gilbert swung the axe several times, but in his haste the handle broke and the blade flew. He dropped the handle from stinging hands and pushed on the trunk. The tree swayed and groaned but would not topple. He began chopping with his machete, but even as the tree began to fall his ear caught the sound of feet slapping the path.

Without waiting for the crash he ran on, striving to outdistance the Indians who now were shouting behind him. Rain was still dripping from the trees, but the clouds were scattering and disclosing a pale moon. Now and again he glimpsed a black wraith some thirty strides ahead.

He had been running with the recklessness of panic, had been risking headlong sprawls into depressions and collisions with trees. But now he was sensible of muscles knotting in his legs, of an eye watering from the lash of a switch, of tortured lungs pleading for mercy. His whole body screamed for relief, threatened him with revolt, commanded him to hide in the undergrowth and let the shouting pursuers pass. His mind agreed with his body, insisted that he had no choice. And yet he could obey neither pain nor thought, for the dominant part of his being was emotion, a need to know if Wilhelmina reached the canoe.

Jogging just behind Atiron, he did not look back even when they were scrambling down the high bank of the river. Beyond Atiron he saw only one canoe. The other was gone. Was Wilhelmina aboard?

The Mohawks answered his surgent questions as they pushed off and paddled out upon the current. Yes, they told him, two women had just come. Both were in the other canoe. "Which one was his?" they asked. "*Kai-a-tan-oran?*"

"Yes," he agreed. "That one. She of the noble body."

He was proud of her, but there was still danger of encountering Abenaki and Huron canoes, and so his joy was mitigated by doubts and fears. Once he found his hands clutching the gunwales as he peered down river, once heard Atiron tell him to sit down. It seemed hours instead of minutes before the ships loomed in the darkness, before at last the tension of his body snapped and left him quivering with the sure knowledge of success.

As the Mohawks paddled closer he saw that the other canoe was riding at the waterline of the *Six Friends* and that figures were climbing up to the ship's lantern-lit deck. One of them was clinging to the scramble net and twisting toward him. She called aloud:

"Gil? Gilbert?" So anxious were those cries that for an instant it seemed she must fall if he could not reassure her.

"Mina!" was all he could manage. "Mina." And when his hand caught the net he could hardly begin climbing. He tried, and found himself beside her, urging her to climb to safety. How frightened, how helpless she was! For a moment while she looked at him it seemed she would forget the ropes and embrace him.

"Mina! Climb!" To support her he put his free arm about her quivering wrist. "It's all over, my own—all of it."

"Oh Gil! Then you do not know? Oh Gilbert!"

"My dearest! What matters now? We're together at last, and tomorrow we sail."

It was clear that he knew nothing about Jem, but this was not the time to tell him. She ran her hand along his hard arm. He was strong, as wiry as an Indian. And he was brave, brave enough this night to risk capture by the Hurons. But what was he telling her now? She listened and wished intensely that she could respond to his assurances of love. How wonderful it would be if they really could sail away on this ship. She silenced him with her fingers to his lips. "I have something to tell you—not here." She could scarcely cling to the ropes, but his arm, tightening about her again, seemed to give her strength. They would have need of his strength, all of it and more. And more than strength, more than courage, they would have need of luck. Of a sudden she was recollecting the landmarks along the Etchemin River and the upper Saint John.

Chapter 23

In the cabin when at last they were alone she clung to him, and for a while she could not remember what it was she had meant to tell. Nor did she try to remember as she looked up into his eyes. What she saw there in their depths would have dispelled all misgivings that could have troubled her if they had come to mind. Revelling in the fullness of his marvelling joy, she thought of nothing save the wondrousness of being to him as he was to her. How many minutes they enjoyed and how many words exchanged could only be guessed later, for at the time her senses lost themselves in happiness.

At last she remembered hastily the troubled past and tried to conjure up the danger which she must sometime face. What was it? A twinge of uneasiness warned her that the danger was great, and she fought to suppress her erupting memory and so to prolong this unlimited joyfulness.

"You've changed," she thought, perhaps even said aloud, for his lips moved in reply. Yes, his features had changed much. They had changed so much that each, and even his face as a whole, seemed new and strange. She touched the taut skin over his cheekbones and ran her fingers into the hollow of his temple and then across the ridge of one brow and so down over the bridge of his nose that once was soft and straight but now was firm and bold. There was a scar on his lower lip as if at some distant time he had bitten himself in thought. She touched it with her fingertip and laughed when his broad smile distended the scar to twice its size. His teeth, she noticed with a shock, were shorter than those she remembered. They were worn as if he had gnawed

on meatless bones. Instinctively she ran her finger along the upper row as she had often done when Jem was cutting his teeth—and now she knew what must be said.

He must have noticed the change in her eyes or felt the quick tension in her body, for instantly his smile died with a question:

She told him, and so the remaining hours of that night were consumed not in thanksgiving but in preparation. There was no time for discussing their separate pasts. They exchanged only the facts relevant to the present: the plight of their son, the intention of Phips to sail tomorrow, the distance to Meductic and then to New England, the food and equipment they would need for the journey.

Although smarting under the failure of the campaign, Sir William Phips consented to their plan and would have called for volunteers to accompany them. Amid the crowd gathered on the deck Mina instantly shook her head.

"No," she refused before Gilbert could reply to Phips. "No. Force is hopeless. Only by stealth may we hope to enter Meductic. In numbers we would defeat our own purpose." She looked into Captain Vetch's eyes and thought how clumsy he would be in the forest, even if she could trust him and his Lambs. "We leave tonight as soon as we can."

And so it was agreed. Phips gave orders, and men hustled to supply them with their needs. The crowd dispersed, most of the seamen and soldiers going below but some remaining on watch. Captain Vetch, after consulting with Phips on the afterdeck, came stalking to the waist. In spite of her absorption with the sorting and the packing Wilhelmina was glad she was not alone on the deck.

"Milady," began Vetch, "I would apologize—and beg forgiveness, if I may."

She looked for Gilbert, but he was conferring with the Mohawks farther along the waist. "Please, not now. So little time remains. Another day, perhaps?" She felt ingrate, for his thin

lips were set as though the apology came hard to one who suffered remorse. And yet, although she despised him even above the most cruel of the Abenakis, she pitied him too. If what Gilbert had told her was true, then this man had come to make amends, to beg forgiveness. Perhaps he feared that she might prosecute him in England. Yes, that was it. Nothing else could explain his present solicitude.

"My Lady of Roebury," he said respectfully, too respectfully, she thought, for in her bucksins she must look like a squaw. "If I can be of service?" She ignored him, but he continued: "I beg of you, Milady, hear me out and satisfy my queries. Or would you have me suspect of King William?"

"Talk—if you must."

"I have orders to fetch you back to England, but I understand why you must go into the wilderness. And I will not press you. But Milady, you will allow me the privilege of setting you ashore. My men have a boat in readiness—though for the purpose of rowing me to the *Primrose*. You will not deny me this?"

"Captain Vetch. Know I trust you not a whit."

"Milady." Acquiescence was in his tone as he bowed.

She regretted her denounciation and wished that she had remembered herself a lady. A lady! After all these years she would never learn to behave as the Mistress of Roebury. But that thought was soon forgotten as her mind returned to Vetch. "I am sorry," she apologized for her rudeness. "If we needed a boat . . . But we have a canoe. It's speedier, and it's against the current."

"You go up this river then?"

"Yes—and up another. A heavy boat is useless on the Etchemin."

"Etchemin River? Milady, forgive me. It is only that I fear for your. . . ." He broke off as if only now recognizing her aversion toward him. "Then I shall await your arrival in Eng-

land. Good-bye, Milady. And may God bless you in this venture."

"Good-bye," she answered as cordially as her mixed feelings allowed. Although he had told her that his men were to row him down to the *Primrose* she could not breathe easily until he went overside.

Presently Gilbert returned. "All arranged," he said. "The Mohawks come with us—all twelve."

"All?"

"All or none. Atiron thinks it best. There may be fighting."

She nodded and set about the work as the Mohawks crowded round. In an hour all was ready. They took their places in the canoes and paddled stealthily away from the ships. Presently the rock of Quebec loomed high to the right. The Mohawks steered to the left and then followed the shore. Dawn was close at hand when the canoes entered the estuary of the Etchemin River.

"Land over there," Wilhelmina told Atiron and Gilbert who were behind her in the stern. Of the entire fifteen—twelve Mohawks, Gilbert, Nona-sis and herself—only the two women had travelled the route, and as the Passamaquoddy squaw could speak neither Mohawk nor English, the responsibility of guiding the party fell to Wilhelmina. "See? That ledge of rock. The beginning of the portage around the gorge."

Aitron murmured a low word to the paddlers, and their canoe turned shoreward, but as it glided close to the bank the chief hissed a command that caused the Mohawks to back water. Wilhelmina, too, heard the thump on the bank father upstream, but it was Gilbert's voice that reflected her thoughts:

"Abenakis? Hurons?"

"Red man no wear boot," Atiron whispered. "Maybe moose. Maybe Frenchman. Listen!"

Wilhelmina heard the snapping of twigs, but before another English word could be spoken a hushed *"Ho!"* came from the second canoe now drawing abreast. Instantly all looked back over the water toward the Saint Lawrence. In the first glimmer of dawn Wilhelmina saw what made her cringe within herself. Some eight or ten canoes were racing into the estuary, racing silently as if to overtake the Mohawks without giving them alarm.

Atiron was quick to make the only possible decision. That enemies might be lurking on the bank was a possibility, even a probability, but that enemies were in the pursuing canoes was a certainty. *"Goh-geh!"* he barked, adding hurried words as both canoes lunged forward.

"Mina!" Gilbert's voice was sharp with urgency. "We're leaving the canoes behind and running. Is there a trail?"

"A short portage. And then the forest."

"You're to lead the way on the portage. After that . . . Is it a matter of following the stream?"

"Yes."

He shouted something unintelligible to the Mohawks and broke into English again. "Tell that squaw we run for it. The rest of us know."

Wilhelmina fairly screamed the order as the pursuing Hurons burst into terrifying whoops. The Mohawks snatched up their weapons, jumped into the water, and waded ashore. A sack over her shoulder, Wilhelmina was climbing the bank ahead of the Mohawks when dark figures issued from the underbrush and gathered on the landing. Instantly, for her last glimpse of Captain Vetch had been in equally feeble light, she recognized him. And yet the surprise confused her until, in a voice betraying anxiety, he began explaining his presence:

"We . . ." Vetch waved at the hulking figures of six or eight Lambs. "We feared for your safety, and so we came

here—ah—to assure—ah . . ." Vetch found himself facing Gilbert. "But surely you cannot doubt. . . ."

"I do!" Gilbert had a machete in hand, but his words were as sharp. "You came to ambush us—without knowing our numbers. And now you plead for mercy!" Gilbert threw a desperate glance at Wilhelmina. "Run on! Hurry!"

Her reply was shrill, for some of the Mohawks had already found the portage and were leaping past the Lambs. "It's no time for talk! Gilbert! If you must have vengeance, leave Vetch to those Hurons!" She struck Gilbert's arm, shocked him out of his anger, and then ran with him across the landing and ahead of him along the narrow portage. With nothing but one sack of corn over her shoulder she ran swiftly until her pace was retarded by a heavily encumbered Mohawk whom she could not pass on the narrow trail. Behind them the Huron war cries were still loud, but there was no sound of an encounter with the Lambs. During a lull in the distant shouting Wilhelmina heard one disdainful word that told of Abenakis among the Hurons. That thought appalled her, for it meant that she and Nona-sis were not alone in their knowledge of this route. But now the trail was bending to the right, toward the river. The foremost Mohawk suddenly turned and yelled a question. From behind came an answer in Atiron's voice: *"Asen ti-swa-ka-we. . . ."*

The leading Mohawks and Nona-sis plunged into the thickets as Gilbert spoke over Wilhelmina's shoulder. "Three crow caws. Tell that squaw."

Wilhelmina guessed what he meant, for already the Mohawks were separating in the undergrowth. Before long the party would be scattered, and if ever they were to unite they had need of a signal. As she dashed into the thickets she glimpsed Nona-sis vanishing beyond a clump of young balsams. *"No-ho-uk ka-ka-kos-ak,"* she panted. Three caws. Come when you hear three caws. A bough sprang back from the shoulder of the nearest Mohawk and whipped her face.

She ducked beneath another bough and angled to the left, locating the decaying bole of a fallen pine and running along its mossy length to outdistance the Mohawk.

"Gil?"

"I'm here," he answered as if her question were complete. "And will be."

He would be close behind her all the way, and would understand her incoherent questions too. Years ago, she remembered as she leaped over roots and dodged trees, they used to guess each other's thoughts, and now that former communion was revived. It was almost as if, although physically they had been separated, their minds had been united all these years. She was thinking in this vein when a muffled scream reminded her of the Lambs. They must have fled the Hurons, for there had been no sounds of combat, but one of them had been overtaken.

It was noon when they heard the raucous call of a crow—of a real crow, for the calls faded quickly with increasing distance as the bird flew. Almost at once the snap of a twig followed by heavy breathing and the scuffing of moccasins warned them to crouch in hiding.

"Hurons?" she asked in a whisper, following his example and parting the boughs. She saw four Mohawks—no, five—jogging in single file toward them.

Bursting out of the thicket, they might have startled Atiron except for Gilbert's reassuring *"Ho"* which brought the Mohawks forward apace. There was no pause as the two parties united. On they filed one behind another, Atiron leading the way, Mina next, then Gilbert, and the rest following as might the tail of a writhing snake. Gilbert soon had news to relay to Wilhelmina. It seemed that the Hurons and Abenakis feared an ambush, for in one strong body they were advancing cautiously. Only one of the fugitives had been overtaken—an Englishman.

"Gil," she asked when the party halted to drink at a brook, "shall we tell the Mohawks?"

"Not unless Vetch somehow manages to join us. And even then, if he's wise. . . ."

"You don't think he would?"

"He's no fool, not Vetch. He's heard enough about Canadian Indians—and Mohawks too. If he wants to see England . . ."

Gilbert had dipped his cupped hand in the brook. The water had leaked out between his fingers while he talked, and now a red maple leaf clung to his wet palm. He looked upstream and beckoned to Atiron.

After glancing at the current, now discolored as if its muddy bed had been disturbed farther upstream, the Mohawks primed their muskets and conferred in whispers. Presently one of them slunk off, following the brook toward its source. He disappeared among the trees, but shortly Wilhelmina heard three caws—the signal.

Following Atiron, she jogged toward the sound that now was repeated more urgently. She had scarcely taken ten paces when a musket shot echoed in the forest. The entire party dashed upstream toward the report. The scout met them. Puzzled, he told of sighting the Englishmen who had fired on him and had fled.

"But why?" she asked Gilbert when he interpreted the discussion.

"Likely the Lambs thought we were Hurons. What matters most, though, is that shot. It will assure the Hurons and Abenakis we're here. They won't fear an ambush and will hurry on. Are you tired?"

"No."

Somehow he could believe her. He had become accustomed to her appearance, and now he was beginning to acknowledge her stamina. Following her as they jogged southward through the forest, he marveled at her lithe body, at her

supple ankles that turned and twisted this way and that in the Indian fashion as her feet instinctively sought comfortable spaces among stones and roots. His first sight of her under the lantern aboard the ship had shocked him, and for a terrible instant he had been confused. Her tangled hair. Her swarthy skin. Yet she had been strikingly beautiful, in a sense more beautiful than he had remembered. Now, in this wilderness, she seemed a very woodland goddess. No wonder, he thought, no wonder the Mohawks called her Kai-a-tan-oran! She was as graceful as a doe.

The musket banged against his hip. He swung the heavy weapon to his shoulder where it thumped with each stride. Ahead of him Wilhelmina seemed conscious of her unruly hair, though why she kept brushing it behind her ears was a puzzle, for the passing twigs were enough to comb it away from her eyes.

Suddenly Atiron halted in his tracks, one leg still extended forward as if all the while he had been tiptoeing. Almost simultaneously the entire line was crouching low and listening to the tramp of boots and the snapping of branches. Presently seven Lambs appeared a little in advance and to the left. Heading toward the river, they were glancing apprehensively back over their shoulders as if expecting pursuit from the east instead of from the north where the Mohawks crouched. Immediately Gilbert surmised their error: The Lambs were running in semi-circles, in great arcs that always led them to the right and brought them back to the river whence they started off again. Except for the river they would have circled until they dropped from exhaustion. Indeed, although they still clung together and raced in panic, they were near the point of collapse. Even as they crossed at right angles in front of Atiron one of them stumbled, fell on hands and knees, and rose without his musket to chase after the others.

Atiron called in English: "Where you run like rabbit?"

The Lambs halted and stared, but few of them had the breath to gasp words to each other. For a moment they seemed on the point of flight, but Vetch must have recognized Wilhelmina and Gilbert, for he blurted at his men who stood their ground while the Mohawk file approached. Of the Lambs only Vetch, as frightened and discouraged as the rest, retained his musket. The others, a sorry lot in torn shirts, breeches, and scuffed boots, had thrown their heavy weapons away during the flight.

"Axford," pleaded Vetch in a voice choked with terror. "Spare me! Spare me—in the name of God!" He dropped his musket and knelt as if confronted not by God but by Satan. "I meant no harm."

"No harm?" To Gilbert the lie was obvious, even ludicrous enough to soften his sarcasm: "Of course not. You meant to see us safely on our way—at the risk of missing your ships. It was right noble of you, Vetch—though a surprise to us. Few would have done the like."

"Before God, Axford. Spare us. . . ."

"Quiet! And heed! You're a knave, Vetch, but I've no mind to kill you as I ought." Glimpsing relief in the captain's close-set eyes, Gilbert felt his anger changing to pity as he wondered how long these Lambs would survive in the forest. "Vetch, your only hope is to reach the ships. Go north-east to the Saint Lawrence. . . ."

"They sailed."

"You saw them?"

"From a tree. We can't return. Spare us, let us go with you. Those Hurons . . . Axford—in the name of God!"

Gilbert felt Wilhelmina's hand upon his arm. He looked down into her eyes and recognized pity. "But Mina, if we let him come. . . ."

"I know. But Gilbert—to leave them here? After all, we may be wrong about him. He did come with news for me. And these others. . . ."

Still on his knees, Vetch seized her hand. "Milady, I beg it. We can't go back. The Hurons. . . ."

She felt his fingers trembling in spite of his strong grip on her hand. "The Abenakis are just as cruel," she warned him. "And we go to their biggest fort. We may die—all of us." The thought reminded her of the need to hurry. She jerked her hand away and picked up her sack of corn. Without a word she led the way, but English voices made her glance backwards after a hundred steps. Through the open hardwoods she saw the file of Mohawks and beyond them the knot of debating Lambs. She did not look back again, but the pounding of boots told her of their decision. They were attempting to follow. Wilhelmina forgot them almost immediately as Atiron, cupping his hands and tilting his face toward the sky, voiced the harsh calls of a crow.

She set the pace now, watching the sun and the shadows, and jogging among the trees in as straight a line as the innumerable obstructions allowed. During the afternoon Atiron repeated the crow calls at intervals, and toward dusk the signals were answered from a position well off to the right and far ahead. During the twilight the answering calls grew louder until the two converging groups united.

At a bend of the river they halted to munch corn and to rest. Of the twenty-two in the party only the seven Lambs immediately lay down. The others clustered around Wilhelmina and Nona-sis who discussed the twists and turns of the Etchemin River and agreed that from this point it curved far to the west before bending east and dwindling to a brook. They agreed also that a course due east would lead them to the head-like hill opposite the portage.

Yet when an hour later the party was plodding eastward under the moonlit sky Wilhelmina was troubled. Had they really come as far as she thought? That bend back there looked so strange in the dark. Perhaps she was mistaken. Perhaps they were heading east too soon. Thus she worried,

envisioning calamity as she imagined what would happen if they failed to locate the canoes on the Saint John River—or worse, what would happen if the Abenakis and Hurons, guessing their destination, were to race ahead and ambush them on the portage. François? The other Penobscots? Surely they would guess her plan. Of a sudden she halted, but remembered herself and proceeded.

"Mina?" Gilbert must have sensed her alarm, for his voice was anxious. "Something wrong?"

"I just thought. . . ."

"What is it?"

"The Penobscots. They may have guessed . . . Gilbert, they know me too well—where I go."

"To Meductic?"

"Yes."

"But if we reach the canoes first. . . ."

"We must. Oh Gilbert, if we don't. . . ."

They said no more, nor was there need to, for Atiron overheard and quickened his pace. There was an hour of uncertainty, another, and then that intensity of suspense after they sighted the head-like hill that marked the portage joining the headwaters of the Etchemin and the Saint John. In her absorption with the possible ambush Wilhelmina had forgotten her dread of going astray in the forest, and now she felt no glow of satisfaction on having led the party so unerringly.

Warnings to silence passed back along the line as they approached the stream. All halted on the bank while Atiron whispered his orders first in Mohawk and then in English. Then four scouts waded the narrow stream and vanished into the woods on either side of the portage. The rest waited, listening for the bark of a prowling fox—the signal for them to follow.

For Wilhelmina those anxious minutes were almost beyond endurance. Though Gilbert's arm encircled her waist

his presence could not dispel her misgivings. Indeed he was as nervous as she. His tense arm was shaking.

"Please, God," she prayed in a whisper. "Please."

There was another moment of uncertainty and then the faint yelp of a fox followed by another less distant. Wilhelmina and Gilbert leaped into the stream behind Atiron. With a word of thankfulness on her lips she splashed across and climbed out on the landing. It was then that a Mohawk whispered a warning. The entire party, even Vetch and his clumsy Lambs, froze in silence.

Downstream, not more than two hundred paces distant, a moose was trotting up against the current. Drops of moonlight sparkled in front of his splashing hoofs. What had startled that moose? The tacit question prompted Wilhelmina to look first at Gilbert on her left and then at Atiron on her right. The tacit answer urged her to run. Springing toward the path she heard a cry from one of the Lambs and almost simultaneously a musket shot. She turned, saw the moose plunging toward the far bank, heard Atiron's remonstrance, and surmised the rest. Silas Vetch, standing in midstream and taking fright, had fired. So thought Wilhelmina during that first instant before she heard the war cries of the Abenakis and Hurons who had apparently divided into two parties and had just reached the stream at points some distance above and below the landing.

"Gil!" She turned and ran down the portage, calling to him again a moment later. He answered her, and she retarded her pace until he was running at her heels.

"How far?" he asked.

"Miles and miles."

"Then not so fast."

"But the Abenakis! The Hurons!"

"Atiron will delay them."

"Delay?"

"Threaten an ambush. The Canadian Indians will fear one

anyway, and a few Mohawk yells off to the left and right . . ."

After that they saved their breath. Now and again a fallen tree blocked the portage, but for the most part the footing was smooth during those first minutes. They soon overtook the four scouts who were jogging on in advance. How long they ran thus was impossible to determine, for the moon seemed to veer with every twist of the portage. The windfalls, humps, and hollows demanded much of her attention, but part of her mind was occupied with Jem. At this season he would still be at Meductic, but presently Ka-ka-kos and Ah-tum-e-gun would start up river for their winter camp above Grand Falls. Even now Ka-ka-kos might be poling upstream. That thought, the possibility of missing Jem on the river, worried her as much as the sure knowledge of the Abenakis in pursuit. She was on the point of confiding her misgivings to Gilbert when the portage, tilting suddenly downward toward the narrow stretch of gleaming water, posed a more immediate question. The canoes? Were they still at the landing?

Those last minutes seemed ages to Wilhelmina. The uncertainty preyed upon her nerves and quickened her pace to recklessness. She stumbled over a root, fell to hands and knees, and almost forgot her sack of corn as she recovered footing. But her concern was unfounded. On bursting out of the portage she saw the canoes on the wide ledge of rock. Her great relief amounted to exultation, but almost immediately fresh uncertainties crowded her mind. The water? Was it too shallow for a rapid descent? No. Rain had swelled the current. The Mohawks on the portage? Would they never come? The canoes? She counted only six. Were more hidden in the woods?

"Gil?" She ran to him at the water's edge. "How many canoes do we need? Four?"

"Four of these. They're small. You mean? Of course! We'll smash the others."

The Mohawk scouts were already examining the canoes. Gilbert spoke to them. While Wilhelmina gathered extra paddles the men carried four canoes to the water, tested them for leaks, and made ready for a sudden departure. Nona-sis arrived while they were chopping at the remaining canoes. She was alone, but to Wilhelmina's question, *"Toni Magui-ak?"* the squaw replied that the Mohawks were far to the rear.

Dawn was still two hours away when the Lambs staggered out of the trail. Exhausted and frightened, they looked wildly about the landing. Vetch, a pitiful sight in torn shirt and breaches, had discarded his musket. An ugly gash darkened his bare right knee as if he had fallen on a jagged stone, and one eye was closed and bloodied. As he limped toward Gilbert and Wilhelmina, she momentarily forgot her distrust in a flood of sympathy. Vetch tried to speak between great wheezing breaths, but only his gestures and his terrified glances toward the portage were intelligible.

Pitying him, she pointed to the canoes. "It will be easier now. From here we paddle downstream."

Impulsively he seized her hand and kissed it as he fell to his knees. The pain in his gashed knee must have been excruciating, but in his gratitude he seemed oblivious of the agony. Of his incoherent words Wilhelmina recognized only two, "God bless," but the very intensity of his pathetic gasps conveyed his thanks.

Gilbert beckoned to the six other Lambs, led them to the water, and allotted two to each of three canoes. Vetch crawled into another.

The yelping of a fox came from deep in the woods. Instantly the scouts repeated the yelps, but the pounding of their hatchets continued for a moment as the Mohawks destroyed the unwanted canoes.

"It's time to go, Mina," Gilbert warned her when the scouts took their places, one at the stern of each canoe.

She stepped into the foremost canoe, rearranged the paddles for the expected Mohawks, and took a position in front of Gilbert. They had not long to wait. The silent Mohawks filed swiftly out of the portage and into the canoes, and just in time, for the Abenakis and Hurons, shouting encouragement to their foremost warriors, were descending the hill.

Paddles pushed at the ledge of rock, pushed on the bottom, drove the canoes out into deep water. And then they were paddling downstream with twice the speed of the current.

Yet none of the Mohawks shouted back at their enemies who were already running down the beaches and splashing through the shallows. The river was too dark, too full of rocks, too often overhung with sweepers. For an hour it seemed that the pursuers might overtake them, but when dawn came to reveal the hazards of the river and to permit a swifter flight, the Abenakis were far behind.

Exhaustion claimed Wilhelmina. Tense and sleepless for two days and nights, she could no longer paddle in time with the Mohawks. She stowed her paddle, curled up on the bottom of the canoe, and fell asleep before anxiety about the future could displace her present relief.

Chapter 24

THE TOSSING of the canoe, the jarring of waves on its thin bottom, and the roaring of swift water startled her into wakefulness. She sat up, clutching her paddle and glancing down-

stream as the canoe skimmed out over the pool at the foot of the rapids. The stream was still narrow, still overhung with sweepers. It had not yet merged with the larger tributary. "No sign of the Hurons and Abenakis? We broke all the other canoes?"

"Not all," Gilbert replied. "We sighted one an hour ago—a half mile back. They're keeping their distance. Abenakis."

It was no surprise to Wilhelmina, yet it stimulated her anxiety. "If they pass us some night—where the river widens . . . If they get ahead and warn the villages. . . ."

"We thought of that. They won't pass. Not in that canoe. Tonight we set an ambush."

"How?" Looking back she saw that only two of the four stolen canoes were on the river, and she guessed Atiron's strategy before Gilbert explained it. Two crews of Mohawks had gone ashore, had hidden their canoes, and had allowed the Abenakis to pass. Later the Mohawks to the rear would drive the Abenakis into an ambush set by those in the foremost canoes.

But that evening after the leading half of the party went ashore Wilhelmina worried that the plan might fail. Watching from bushes on the bank of the stream, she trembled when in their canoe the Abenakis rounded the bend upstream and paddled down on the current as if oblivious of the ambush. Their wet paddles gleamed in the twilight.

She looked about her in the undergrowth. The two stolen canoes were well hidden from the oncoming Abenakis. The Lambs were as tense as she, but they well understood the need of silence and were all but holding their breath as they stared up at the great cedar overhanging the stream. Hidden in the dark foliage of the cedar, Gilbert and the Mohawks were scarcely discernible even to Wilhelmina. She heard an exclamation of disappointment, and looking upstream again, saw the suspicious Abenakis paddling toward the opposite shore. They landed on the beach some three or four

hundred strokes distant. But Gilbert and the Mohawks did not descend to the bank. Instead they remained in the cedar and clung to their loaded muskets and heavy boulders.

Still watching the darkening river Wilhelmina heard Vetch at her side. "Have a care," she warned when his staff, a six foot length of poplar cut by a beaver, banged against the cedar.

"What are they doing on the beach?" he whispered.

His voice betrayed so much fear that she thought it best to explain the Abenakis' delay. "They're cautious, that's all. An ambush is an old trick, and they suspect it. This place—the tree over the water, and the river so narrow here. They will scout us out. See? Half of them are entering the forest."

"If they see us. . . ." He looked up at the dark shapes in the cedar.

"They will. But it's the canoe we want, not them. If they have time to portage around us—but they haven't. Look!"

Two canoes, rounding the curve upstream, were bearing down upon the one in the beach. The three or four Abenakis (in the darkness their numbers were indefinite) must have seen the descending canoes, for they called and kept calling to their scouts as they paddled downstream close to the shore. Shortly the scouts emerged from the woods, splashed through the shallows, and climbed into the canoe. On they came, some eight or ten paddlers who fairly lifted the canoe out of the water which now swept them around the ledge that narrowed the stream. They realized their peril now—the tree bending under the weight of Mohawks and boulders. In ten strokes they would pass beneath the cedar. If they succeeded, Wilhelmina thought with a shudder, they would escape to warn every Malisete village of the approaching Mohawks. And yet she cringed at the prospect of boulders and musket balls killing those striving paddlers. Somehow their admirable efforts stirred her sympathy, and for an instant Wilhelmina was distraught with conflicting dreads—

dread that they would escape, dread that they would die.

It was her own name, Wa-wil-om-wa, linked with a threatening Penobscot word implying vengeance, that shocked her into realizing and shaking off her sympathy. The vengeful man, a hulking brute with the figure of a deformed bear, was kneeling in the stern of the canoe and looking up as if he expected to glimpse her in the cedar. Although she had never seen that man before she guessed his name even before Nona-sis hissed it in her ear:

"Plansoe!"

"François!" Wilhelmina had scarcely repeated the awesome name when the half-breed bellowed a command which his warriors obeyed so quickly that the canoe was swamped to the gunwales before the muskets blazed and roared in the tree. Some falling, others diving, the Abenakis submerged—the wounded to drown, the unhurt to swim under-water. And now boulders dropped from the cedar and splashed harmlessly in the swamped canoe, their destructive force broken by the water. For a moment it seemed that the fragile craft, now hidden by the boughs of the sweeper, would pass undamaged—perhaps to be emptied of water and manned by the surviving swimmers, among them François whose well-demonstrated cunning might enable them to escape in the gathering darkness.

The same thought must have occurred to Nona-sis, for of a sudden the squaw appeared with a thick pole sharpened at both ends as if gnawed by a beaver. She leaped upon the slanting tree. The bow of the swamped canoe was emerging from the cedar boughs when Nona-sis plunged the staff down through the boughs. The pole must have pierced the bottom of the canoe and braced itself against a thwart, for instantly there was the sound of branches cracking. Presently the water was gurgling as the sunken craft swung across the current. Shouts followed, but in the confusion about her Wilhelmina was not aware of them. She only knew that the

Abenakis, three or four at least, were soon climbing up through the boughs, and that the Mohawks were striking at them with knives and hatchets. She saw François, raised to the surface by the wash of the current, gripping a trailing branch. Gilbert lopped off the branch, and the half-breed disappeared downstream. The entire incident occupied only a minute, and now Wilhelmina felt Gilbert's hand urging her toward the canoes which the Mohawks were already launching.

As she took her place the other canoes swept down through the sluice. In a moment Wilhelmina, Gilbert, Nona-sis and three Mohawks were racing down on the current. A head bobbed up in the water near them, and hands reached for the gunwales as if to upset them, but with a paddle Nona-sis stabbed at the painted face. It sank. The Mohawks in the leading canoe were hacking at the bottom of the capsized one although it was already wrecked beyond repair. A savage threat, a threat so vengeful that Nona-sis shrank low in the canoe and muttered the half-breed's name, was heard from the direction of the bank. A stone thudded against the gunwale. François had escaped, but to hunt him in the dark forest would delay the flight too long. So said Gilbert after exchanging shouts with Atiron.

The canoes rushed on. Within minutes they were out of earshot. Although the darkening stream was full of treacherous rocks and sluices, they proceeded during the night, and long before morning they were paddling on the broader waters of the main river. Seldom landing, they rested by turns in the canoes that day and the next, but on approaching the westernmost sites of the Malisete winter camps only the Lambs slept, and they fitfully.

The Passamaquoddy squaw knew few of the Malisete camp sites, for she had travelled these waters only on her way to Quebec. And so it was that the Mohawks depended more and more on Wilhelmina. Now and again she pointed to the

mouth of an inflowing stream. At such times the Mohawks would land, scout out the camp sites, and find no Malisetes. The delays were not altogether worthless, for often they located and destroyed hidden canoes. Even so, Wilhelmina feared that the pursuing Abenakis, after patching a broken canoe or finding an undamaged one, would overtake and pass them at night. The thought troubled her no end, for the success of her venture depended on stealth. At each turn of the river she dreaded the possibility of sighting Malisetes who, if warned of the Mohawk descent, would be gathering strength in preparation for conflict.

"There! Oh Gil! It's where we spent last winter." She pointed at the mouth of a brook.

"Any canoes?"

"One—moose skin. Ka-ka-kos used it on the ponds in the spring."

They went ashore. The wigwam was deserted. A bear had torn away a strip of bark and scattered the boughs of the mattress. While the Mohawks destroyed the frame of the canoe Wilhelmina led Gilbert into the wigwam. Suspended from a hook near the smoke vent was a pair of tiny moccasins. They had been hung up to dry and had been forgotten that spring.

Gilbert took them down. "His?" That one word was all he could manage. He stared at the moccasins and clenched his teeth as if he too could not restrain his emotions.

"Yes—Jem's. Oh Gil, if only. . . ."

He stuffed the moccasins under his leather shirt, but he could not reply. Instead he ducked through the doorway, took her hand as she emerged, and ran behind the Mohawks to the canoes. Later that day she saw him examining the moccasins, turning them over and over in his hands, and feeling the impressions left by small toes. The moccasins, wet when she had hung them in the wigwam, had dried and stiffened to the shape of Jem's feet.

"I never knew . . . Mina, you know I tried to come. . . ."

Doubt had never possessed her, and now she would have told him, but a distant moan came up the river as the breeze hushed for a moment. "Hear?"

"The falls?"

"Yes." She was recalling how Ka-ka-kos had told the story of Malo-di-anna and the Mohawks, how Jem had asked her more, and now she trembled to think that her son might prefer Ka-ka-kos to a stranger—Gilbert. Perhaps Jem would even refuse to come with them. But no! He had cried when she had left him at Meductic. "Oh Gil! I promised to return! He's waiting for me now!"

"And we will, Mina. We will."

His determination was somehow comforting in spite of her own misgivings. There were so many hazards awaiting them. And even if they reached Meductic—what then? Despair silenced her awhile, but when the moan of the falls increased to a roar her thoughts returned to the pressing dangers of this hour.

"We'd better land here," she told him when they were still a mile above the portage. "There may be Malisetes at the falls."

The canoes drove toward the shore. Atiron ordered them hidden from the river, bade the Mohawks accompany him, and hurried into the forest. Two hours passed before a scout returned with the news that one Malisete family had been surprised below the falls. Atiron was waiting there.

Hurrying, for the evening was already upon them, they paddled down to the landing above the falls. There they destroyed one of the four canoes and shouldered the others. The portage led them along the rim of the tumultuous gorge, and then down toward the foaming river.

Descending the treacherous portage ahead of the Lambs who were carrying the canoes, Wilhelmina heard a scream above the thunder of falling water. She looked at Gilbert.

"Stop them! Don't they know. . . ." Dropping her light pack, she ran down to the landing. A Malisete canoe lay on the ledge, but it was to the Mohawks, clustered around the Malisetes, that Wilhelmina ran. In terror she sprang through the circle of warriors and stared down at the captives. Four of the five were inert but the father still quivered with life. He was not Ka-ka-kos.

During the next days their progress was slower, for now they traveled cautiously, stealing past a large village one moonless night, raiding a smaller camp the next. On the third day they surprised and slaughtered two families at the mouth of a brook, but on the fourth evening when they landed on the beach above another large village the moon shone brightly. The sky was cold, the stars dense. Glittering on the river, the moonlight forbade an attempt to pass the Malisete river, but there was no choice. To wait another night would be to risk being overtaken. It was possible, Gilbert explained to the uneasy Lambs, that during the descent they had overlooked many camp sites on the upper river, that the Abenakis had located canoes at one of them and had already carried word to the Malisetes who might even now be racing down from the village farther up the river and from the numerous tributaries. Still Vetch argued against exposing themselves on the gleaming river:

"But the village? Think you they won't see us? These canoes—black on the bright river. My God, Axford—we can't pass that village!"

"Stay here if you wish, but the rest of us. . . ." Gilbert jumped to help the Mohawks who were struggling with a big spruce tree that had been uprooted and stranded on the beach by the spring freshet. Most of its branches had been shorn off by ice and rocks, but some twenty-odd prongs and one massive root still projected from the bole. They wrestled with one end at a time until it floated in the water. The great root gave it stability, kept it from rolling in the slack current.

"Take hold, Vetch," Gilbert ordered. "And you there. Keep it from drifting off."

Although Gilbert was impatient with the puzzled Lambs they were soon to understand the preparations, for the Mohawks submerged the canoes, lashed them to the tree, and covered their work with pine branches. When all was ready—the corn and musket-powder lashed atop the bole, the weapons and excess shirts and hoods stowed in the canoes—they waded out into the current and clung to the prongs.

"Afraid?" Gilbert whispered in her ear when her feet left the bottom and in fright she tried to lift her head farther above water.

"How long will it be?"

"An hour or more. But it's safest we keep down."

Now and again her toes slithered over a rock; and once a gravel bar threatened to strand the tree. They towed it into the channel again. Despite her exertions the cold water numbed her legs and arms until it seemed that her hands must presently release the prong. There was no sense of motion, no feeling of water pouring around her body. All seemed as still as the cold stars that scintillated as if they were specks of frost on the boughs over her head.

The eddies of a wide pool swung the tree around so that she could see the glow of fire in the doorways of wigwams. Scarcely more than a sling's throw downstream, the village crowded a hummock of high ground near the water. Moonlight gleamed on the white bark of the wigwams and canoes. A dog bayed above the snarls of a pack that fought over some refuse on the beach. Slowly the ponderous tree drifted closer until she discerned figures moving about in the unfortified village. It was then that a Mohawk gave a low warning. She felt the tree quiver as the Lambs and Mohawks settled deeper into the water.

"What is it, Gil?" she whispered, still watching the village.

"Canoes. Upstream."

She peered through the boughs and saw a long line of vague shapes gliding toward them. "Malisetes!" Her numb body was suddenly alive, vibrant with terror. Without reasoning she knew their purpose. Malisetes were not in the habit of traveling by night.

"Oh, Gil—if only we were past the village. They will stop there for news of us."

"The dogs on the beach, Mina—if they hear you. . . ."

"Does it matter—now? The canoes. . . ."

"We've a chance. If they don't come close. Oh Mina—you can't swim either!"

A hiss from Atiron silenced him. The nearest canoe, if it did not swerve toward the shore, would pass within ten fathoms of the tree. The dogs on the beach howled at the approaching canoes. Indians emerged from the wigwams and ran to the river. The dogs ceased howling and resumed their snapping and snarling over some unseen object on the beach.

"*Kwai! Kwe-e!*" The urgent voice shrilled down from the canoes. Its echoes scarcely died in the valley before an answer came up from the village.

"*Kwe-e! Wen?*"

Wilhelmina did not recognize the voices, but the shouted words confirmed her earlier supposition: The Malisetes were in pursuit. The village was still a furlong below the floating tree, but the foremost canoe was within a stone's throw. An Indian standing in the stern was cupping his hands and shouting questions, then listening. The answer came distinctly enough: The Mohawks had not passed.

Peering through the boughs, Wilhelmina saw the erect Indian sit down and dip his paddle. Although she had seen him only once before, there was no mistaking that ungainly figure. A distraught whisper, the Passamaquoddy squaw's came from the other side of the tree:

"Plansoe."

The tree was swinging again. Wilhelmina cowered lower in the water until ripples lapped about her ears. Her staring eyes seemed gigantic enough to be espied by the canoemen even across the sparkling water and through the brush. She closed her eyes, suffered a moment of uncertainty, and opened them again. The leading canoe was passing far to the right. The others, some twenty or thirty, were veering toward the shore. Somewhere among the boughs a man coughed and sputtered as if he had tried to breathe below the surface. Almost instantly there was a muffled thud like that of an axe breaking through thin ice.

Wilhelmina saw a Malisete in the stern of the last canoe miss a stroke. For a moment he held his paddle high as if he were listening, and then plunged it deep into the water. The canoe turned aside, lengthening the distance between it and the tree which drifted within a hundred yards of the village.

Her ears below the surface, Wilhelmina made herself as inconspicuous as possible until the swinging tree hit the village. When the water trickled out of her ears she distinguished words, among them her own name. Most of the talk was unintelligible to her, but it seemed that the chiefs were discussing the Mohawks. Above it all she heard the wails of a bereaved squaw.

The eddying pool narrowed opposite the village. The current quickened. Presently the voices became indistinct with distance. The Mohawks began whispering, but not until a curve of the river hid them from the village did they attempt to reach the nearest shore, and even then long minutes passed before the tree lay stranded in the shallows.

One of the Lambs was missing when they counted each other on the beach. The long immersion in chilling water had tried even the Mohawks, but the vigorous struggle to beach the tree had restored the circulation in their limbs. They lost no time in emptying the water from the canoes and storing the supplies.

A cramp had contorted Wilhelmina's leg. While she massaged the muscles of her calf, Gilbert, Atiron, and Nona-sis gathered close about her.

"Have we time enough?" In itself Gilbert's question was vague, but all understood its implications, even Nona-sis who had no knowledge of English. That the canoes must pass Meductic tonight or not at all was clear enough.

Wilhelmina glanced up river. No Malisetes were in sight on the moonlit surface. "Yes, if we hurry," she answered. "Atiron, do you understand the plan—everything? You pass Meductic, look for the eagle's nest at the mouth of Eel River, and follow up that stream until above the rapids. Then you wait—at a path leading this way—until Gilbert and I come. The path is four leagues above the mouth of the stream."

The Mohawk chief nodded.

During the night the sky remained clear, but the moon sank long before they approached the Malisete village. The darkness encouraged Wilhelmina, for it meant that the canoes would not be delayed. The party, all except Gilbert and Wilhelmina, would paddle unobserved past Meductic and reach the mouth of Eel River before dawn. By noon, she decided, the Mohawks would have ascended that turbulent stream as far as the overland shortcut which joined the upper part of Eel River to Meductic.

"Here," Wilhelmina directed when the island above Meductic loomed ahead of the canoes. She pointed at the western shore. The canoe veered. A moment later the Mohawks steadied it until Gilbert and Wilhelmina slipped out into the shallow water. Atiron's face was expressionless in the darkness, but his whisper was ominously forceful:

"You do not forget," he warned them. "Wait sun high." He meant that Gilbert and Wilhelmina must remember their promise and hide until almost noon. Before entering the village they were to allow the party sufficient time to ascend the tributary. Otherwise, if the village were prematurely

alarmed, escape would be cut off not only for themselves but also for the Mohawks. The Malisetes would dash up the shortcut.

"Until noon," Gilbert assured him.

Promise or no promise, thought Wilhelmina, she and Gilbert had no alternative to waiting until the canoes were above the rapids. It would be folly to steal Jem tonight before the means of escape was assured. But tomorrow in broad daylight? The Malisetes from the upper villages would arrive tomorrow, perhaps even tonight. "Hurry," she urged Atiron. "Hurry."

They watched the canoe overtake the others and angle toward the far bank. In a moment all four were obliterated by the dark foreground that fringed the pale river.

After wading ashore Wilhelmina and Gilbert crossed the heavily wooded flat and climbed to the rim of the valley. Footpaths and game trails were numerous, and one led them southward for an hour. Night lingered upon them long after they reached the shoulder of the gully behind Meductic. She pointed down, but held Gilbert's sleeve when he would have descended.

"That's the portage," she whispered. "Down there. It leads straight back into the woods."

"How far?"

"To Eel River? Less than two leagues. I've never followed it that far. They use it in the spring when Eel River is too rough for canoes. It's a long carry." She was silent until they looked to the left where the village slept between the dead cornfield and the broad Saint John River. She felt his arms encircle her from behind. "Oh Gil—if we didn't have to wait! If we could only go now while they sleep! Gil, I could steal Jem so sure. He wakes so quiet—never starts. By dawn we could be far along the portage . . . But I know we can't." She leaned back against his chest.

"If we only could! But the canoes . . . Without them. . . ."

"It will be harder by day, Gil. They'll recognize me when I go to the wigwam. And if the news comes first . . . Oh, Gil, it must be done before they come down river!"

"Suppose, Mina, you show me the wigwam now. And then you follow the portage. . . ."

"No. Gilbert, you could never get Jem."

"Why? If you can, why can't I?"

"Because he wouldn't trust you—a stranger." Still in his arms, she moved to face him but checked the motion, unwilling to see his face now. "Gil—I never told him . . . Oh, he knows you exist—but what you look like, what you . . Well, I couldn't lead him to expect you—ever. I couldn't promise—not after so many years . . . You do understand? It was just. . . ." She had known always that Gilbert would try to find her, but in her memory he seemed a boy, a helpless impulsive stripling who must fail. How much he had changed since their parting on the deck of the *Charity!* "Gil, you do see why it is I who must go for Jem?"

"We'll both go," he said resolutely.

"No," she declared with equal firmness. "It would worsen our chances. One of us must live—for Jem."

"Live? If it's a case of that . . . Mina, I cannot let you go—even for him. If I can't get him, then neither can you."

"Will you listen? Will you—until I finish?" She continued when he was silent. "They will suspect me, but they do not understand English. I'll tell Jem to find you here, down there in the gully. I'll explain everything, and he will come to you. See? They will not miss him for hours. By that time you and Jem will be. . . ."

"But you, Mina? You?"

"I'll escape later. François wants me. I'd be safe enough." It was not true, for Ah-tum-e-gun would exact vengeance. With a shudder she recalled how François had threatened retribution when he had paddled into the ambush near the head of the river.

Gilbert felt the shudder. "Almighty! You won't live a day."

Thus they argued until dawn, forgetting the nearness of the village and occasionally raising their voices dangerously. Yet in the end Gilbert submitted in despair. Recognizing at last Wilhelmina's determination and realizing that she treasured her son's freedom more than her own life, Gilbert promised to obey. But during that interminable morning of hiding at the brow of the gully and watching the village his mind struggled bitterly for some alternative plan. Never before, not even when he had thought her dead at Cocheco, had he suffered such cruel distress. Then, when to him she was dead, he had suffered intensely, but there had been another emotion, hatred for her murderers, to distract him from the extremes of grief. Now it was different. She was to dare torture and death deliberately. He knew himself capable of enduring anything for her. But for their son? Could he endure to let her die for a son? In the agony of it he struck a tree with his fist.

"Gilbert! Your knuckles."

"By God, Mina! If the child doesn't come here?"

"Then. . . ."

"Then what?"

"Then you can come for him—during the . . . They will all gather round me. They're like that."

"During the what? The torture. Isn't that it?"

"Call it what you will."

He grasped her wrists, held them fiercely in shaking hands, and released them slowly. Her grey eyes were full of tears that ran out of the corners and down her brown cheeks. What manner of woman was this? For a moment he would not believe she was the same girl who under stress had been wont to sicken and vomit. "Mina, what have you gone through? You're changed so."

"I've seen—things. I know what I want."

"Mina, you can't go through with it. Think! Roebury is yours. In England you. . . ."

"England? I can never go there. Look! Look at me—my hands, my face—a squaw. Look at me, why don't you look at me? What are you looking at?" She turned and followed his gaze toward the river, toward the island above the village.

Under the high sun the river was ablaze with sparkling ripples that curved away from the bows of Malisete canoes. Paddles flashed in her eyes. The flotilla was arriving. In silence they watched the long line of canoes turn into the western channel and head for the beach. Shouts came up from the village. Squaws, braves, old men and children poured out of the fort and the wigwams and ran down to the beach.

"Now," said Gilbert. "Now we go down."

"Oh Gil—was ever such luck!"

Hearts pounding, knees trembling, they clambered down into the gully. The sear stalks in the cornfield hid the village for minutes, and then they took care to keep the wigwams between them and the river. Not an Indian remained in the village. Even the dogs were on the beach. Wilhelmina and Gilbert walked directly to Ah-tum-e-gun's wigwam. Jem was not inside when they entered. A young crow squawked and fluttered in a cage made of woven plaits. It pecked at the cage a moment and then crouched in silence.

"His things!" She gathered them up, a pair of new moccasins lined with fur for the winter, a jacket with sleeves, and a hood. "If only he returns first—before the others come."

They stood on either side of the doorway and waited. Through slits in the bark they watched the beach. An angry horde milled about a chief who spoke in vengeful accents. Children, looking for avenues of ingress, ran up and down the fringe of the crowd or wriggled out of sight among smocks and legs. Jem was not in sight.

"Can't we attract him somehow? Oh Gil! It's so perfect—if he were here, not down there."

"That crow? Is it his?"

"I don't know. Perhaps."

"I mean—if it's his pet . . . Does he like animals—pets?"

"I suppose. Why?"

Gilbert did not answer. Instead he sprang to the cage and waved his hand at the bird. Instantly it fluttered and emitted hoarse squawks in quick succession until Gilbert desisted.

"Mina? Is he coming?"

"Not yet. Try again. Oh, he must hear it! He must."

Again the squawks. The bird was young. A drooping wing suggested that it was crippled. Gilbert frightened the crow repeatedly until Wilhelmina breathlessly told him that Jem was breaking away from the crowd and running directly toward the wigwam.

"He's grown. Gil, come and look. Your son! No! You had better hide. If he sees you first. . . ."

Gilbert heard the sound of moccasined feet running over the hard ground. A small boy, all eyes and curly hair, dived through the low doorway and ran to the cage.

"*Ka-ka-kos-sis?*" the boy cried as if to say, "What is the matter, Little Crow?" And then he saw his mother.

"Jemmy. Oh, Jemmy, my baby." She hugged him tight and warned him against exclaiming. "We are going away and must make no noise. Oh, Jemmy, didn't you know I was coming?"

The boy could not answer at first. He trembled with emotion and clung to her neck as she stood up and held him to her. When he did speak his words were unintelligible, a mixture of Malisete and English with meaning only in their ardor.

"Jemmy, this man, he is. . . ." But there was no time to waste, no time for explanations. Ah-tum-e-gun and Ka-ka-kos or any of the hundreds on the beach might return and make

escape impossible. "We must leave at once, Jemmy." She put him down and took his hand.

"Go?" he said eagerly. "Me too?"

"Yes. We came for you."

"Ah-tum-e-gun go too?"

"No." She guided him toward the dorway, but he hung back. He would miss the squaw. "Jemmy, we must hurry. Ah-tum-e-gun will kill me. Do you remember how we fought on the beach?"

He nodded and started for the door, but he turned again and reached for the bird cage. It was out of reach. "Ka-ka-kos-sis come too."

"Gilbert, are they coming?"

"Not yet." Gilbert answered without turning from the slit in the bark wall. "But we'd best hurry. Every minute. . . ."

"He wants the crow. Bring the crow."

Gilbert loathed crows, had loathed them ever since the first time he had seen them rendering the flesh of dead rebels in England, but now he felt no revulsion. The need to appease the boy was too great. He picked up the cage. The bird squawked until he gave it to Jem who immediately let Wilhelmina guide him through the doorway. The way back to the cornfield was slow, stealthy, but as soon as the stalks provided cover Gilbert picked up his son and ran behind Wilhelmina. The bird called in protest as it swung in its cage. When they were hurrying along the portage its calls brought other crows winging low over the trees. Eventually it desisted.

The ancient portage was free of windfalls. It wound up the gully and then climbed to the plateau. Both were panting at the end of the hour when from a ridge they glanced back toward Meductic and saw a long, wriggling line of savages on the trail. They were less than a mile away.

The portage led suddenly downward into a shallow ravine. Water gleamed through the bare trees. They called and

heard an answer. Within seconds they were gasping in the canoe as six Mohawks drove their poles into the gravel. They were almost out of sight before the first Malisetes reached the landing.

Now the stream opened into a lake. While the Mohawks paddled, Wilhelmina searched the far shore and then pointed out the head of the portage. Presently they were racing along the trail. None slackened pace. None glanced back. All knew that the Malisetes, handicapped during this first part of the race, would follow relentlessly in canoes brought up from Meductic.

Chapter 25

THE FOOTPATH ended at another lake, the source of the Mattawamkeag River. They paddled to the outlet, but from that point onward the shallows and rocks forced all but Jem and Wilhelmina to wade beside the canoe. Wet rocks on the beaches revealed that the advance party, guided by Nonasis, had passed within the hour; and once, just before sunset, a faint yet unmistakably human scream echoing up the valley told of a massacre.

At dusk, still wading beside the canoe, they came upon the scene of butchery, a camp site where a family of Passamaquoddies had been surprised. The Mohawks exchanged questioning glances and examined the beach and bank for signs, at first with anxiety, and then with satisfaction. It appeared that none of the family had escaped to warn the Penobscot

tribes whose hunting grounds lay astride the waterways ahead.

Although accustomed to such revolting scenes, Wilhelmina could not restrain a shudder as Gilbert, without waiting for the Mohawks, towed the canoe past the camp site.

"All those—because of us. Gilbert, must they die?"

He set his jaw until a deepening pool let him stand in the stern and pole toward a quickening sluice. Then: "Bind them, you mean? Bind them and pass? Yes, it would suit our purpose. It would keep them from bearing news ahead of us. But, Mina, the Mohawks crave blood. And the Lambs. . . ." The current gathered and narrowed, drew the canoe into the funnelling sluice and for a moment demanded Gilbert's full attention.

"The Lambs?" she prompted when they glided out upon the swirls of the next pool.

"Equal or worse than the Mohawks."

"Not all. Minton—that ill one. You can see he is different. Kinder than the rest."

"But still a Lamb, Mina—a Lamb. And those. . . ." He waved downstream as if the other canoes, perhaps a league in advance, were visible in the thickening dusk. "Hand-picked by Vetch, as black a lot as could be found in all England."

"If you speak to Vetch . . . After all, he does owe his life to us."

"To us? Or to the Mohawks?"

The canoe scraped on a rock that bent the bark and ribs of the bottom. She stepped out into the black current and eased the bow toward the channel. Jem stirred, chafing his dimly seen hands together, and altering his mother's train of worry. She glanced at the frosty sky and saw her own breath obscuring a patch of stars.

It was an hour before the Mohawks in the trailing canoe overtook them, midnight before both canoes joined the ad-

vance party, and dawn before the river, swollen by tributaries, deepened sufficiently to permit the use of paddles. After that the flight of the united party was swift until they began the slow, cautious labor of poling up the broad Penobscot night and day. Men splashed themselves with cold water to keep awake, chewed *moos-ok* as they poled, shaded their eyes against the glitter of the stream as they watched for enemies—downstream for the Malisetes who must not overtake them, upstream for the Penobscots who must not escape.

None shirked duty. All were driven by fear. Even Minton, ailing from an injury sustained during the descent to Meductic, kept poling until the third evening.

Assigned to the second canoe along with three Mohawks, he had fallen twice across the thwart that afternoon. On each occasion the Mohawks, threatening to throw him overboard, had forced him to resume poling. But this time he collapsed across the gunwale, his legs in the half-swamped canoe, and his face in the river. Immediately a Mohawk lifted his legs overside, and the unconscious man sank, bobbing up some distance nearer the canoe manned by Wilhelmina, Gilbert and two Mohawks.

The Mohawks objected to the additional weight, arguing that Jem and the caged crow were burdens enough, but Wilhelmina and Gilbert prevailed; and Minton, nearer to death from drowning than from broken ribs, was dragged on board —to lie gasping during the night and later to speak his gratitude.

It was from him, during those next days of almost constant toil and vigilance, that Gilbert and Wilhelmina learned of Vetch's plight in England. As Lord of Roebury, he had enjoyed four years of grandeur, had reaped goodly harvests season after season, had won acquaintances at court. And then the Prince of Orange had invaded the kingdom and had driven James from the throne. Still Vetch had felt secure in

his manor until a courier had brought the news: The Lady Wilhelmina, rightful claimant to Roebury, had been located in New Hampshire, and Vetch must prepare to surrender title. Shaken, Vetch had set out for New Hampshire at once.

"To destroy me?" Wilhelmina missed a stroke as she knelt to wet her slippery pole in the river. "To keep Roebury?"

" 'Twas even so."

"And you, Minton? To gain a pittance?"

The Lamb averted his gaze. For a moment he could only swallow the knots in his throat, but at last: " 'Twas then, not now. But to confess—'tis hard, Milady, for a Lamb. Aye, 'twas so."

"And Captain Vetch? Repentant too?"

"Beyond words, Milady. His very life—back there. . . ." A grimace of pain closed Minton's eyes, but as if remorse were stronger than the pangs of tortured lungs, his labored words continued: " 'Twas hard for Vetch to bear—to lose Roebury—if you returned. Milady, he was overwrought. And I—I was his valet there—advised we come. . . ."

An abrupt noise like a beaver's tail slapping water alerted the party. A Mohawk in the last canoe had struck the surface with the flat blade of a paddle. Resembling a brood of wild ducklings, the five canoes darted for the beach and took shelter under the overhanging hemlocks. Scouts climbed the banks, vanished in the forest, and later reported that two canoes, one manned by Malisetes and the other by Penobscots, were following at a distance, biding their time until the main body of pursuers might arrive.

The Lambs, after listening while Gilbert translated the Mohawk's report, broke into rueful predictions of their fate; but Nona-sis, after hearing Wilhelmina out, replied with heartening advice.

"So few will hardly attack by day or night," Wilhelmina told Gilbert and Atiron. "Nona-sis is sure of it, and I agree.

We have only to pretend camping here—to keep them downstream till dawn."

Atiron give quick orders. Lambs and Mohawks alike obeyed with the alacrity of captives running the gauntlet, and before nightfall two campfires were smoldering. They left one canoe in full view on the beach, portaged four others a scant half mile around the curve of the river, and pushed upstream during the long November night.

At dawn no enemy canoes appeared to the rear. The ruse was successful, but in the afternoon Atiron sagely worked another. Two hours were lost in fishing salmon and butchering a moose, but when they paddled up this last deadwater it appeared that they had united with a band of Iroquois—warriors numerous enough to defend themselves. Twenty heaps of ashes told of twenty campfires. The salmon heads, entrails, and gnawed bones that littered the beach suggested a hundred braves.

On and on they fled. Nona-sis guided them well until they reached E-beem, that great irregular lake at the head of the Kennebec; but there she was confused, and so the responsibility fell to Wilhelmina. She led them down the Kennebec until at last Atiron recognized a landmark which he had seen on one of his many raids against the Abenakis. After that the country was new to Wilhelmina. They turned west again, skirting the hunting grounds of the coastal tribes, ascending narrowing streams, crossing lakes, and portaging higher and higher into the mountains. For days they met no people, for now they traversed that vast buffer zone between the Abenaki and Iroquois tribes. It was late in November when they came upon the headwaters of the Connecticut where they launched the canoes and paddled southward with the current through valleys and narrow gorges. Here their progress slowed, for all were spent after weeks of sustained exertion. They rested often, huddling around fires during the cold nights. There came a dawn when the Connecticut, now flow-

ing placidly through an extensive valley, hissed ominously of approaching winter. Slush eddied in the leisurely current. Beads of ice sparkled along the shores.

To Gilbert that dawn was a beauteous one. The signs of winter held no dread for him, for this morning the canoes would reach Pokumtok, the northernmost settlement in this pleasant valley. He knew the village well, for he had passed that way with the army, and now he murmured its English name to himself: "Deerfield." In his unutterable happiness he rose before the others, built up the fire, and boiled the meat for breakfast. For a while he gazed thoughtfully at the flames, and then, the heat smarting his eyes, he turned his back to the fire, his face towards the tributary flowing in from the west. He watched a red fox on the smaller river's far shore until the animal caught the scent of smoke and vanished into the forest.

Wilhelmina was still asleep under the moose skin, but Jem was talking to his caged bird and feeding it corn. Gilbert smiled and forgot the boy for a moment as he saw Wilhelmina stir and open her eyes. She smiled back at him, threw the moose skin aside and rose fully dressed in her leather smock and moccasins.

Soon all twenty-two clustered around the fire, dipping their birch bark vessels into the pot, and sipping the scalding broth. Gilbert led his family a little apart from the Lambs and Mohawks whose leather leggings stank in the heat of the fire. While he and Wilhelmina sat on the moose skin and discussed their brimming plans for the future, the boy talked to the young crow in the cage between his knees. The bird had fared well. Its broken wing had apparently mended, but Jem still insisted that it would die in the big woods. He would open the cage when they came to a farm where there was plenty of corn, but not until then.

The Mohawks and Nona-sis had finished their meal and were now rolling up their greasy blankets and furs in prep-

aration for departure; but the Lambs, eating more slowly, still clustered around the fire. Atiron disappeared and a moment later came from the direction of the tributary.

"Winter come soon," he told Gilbert. "Water freeze. Soon ice too thick for canoe, too thin for walk. I go home now." He waved toward the tributary that flowed out of the west. "You safe now. Tonight you Englishmen sleep in Deerfield."

After the farewells Atiron beckoned to Nona-sis. Their languages were different, but the Passamaquoddy and the Mohawk seemed to understand each other. The squaw gathered up her bundles and followed him down to the canoes. Shortly afterwards the Mohawks were poling up the tributary.

Standing on the bank overlooking the lesser stream, Gilbert waited until the leading canoe vanished around a curve. A rustling of pine needles made him conscious of someone beside him. It was Vetch, a man of few words lately, and those subdued. Still damp after washing in cold water, his beard was tufted like the coat of a sweating horse.

"Gone," he muttered to Gilbert now. "Sleep will come easier tonight—now we've seen the last of them." Nervously tamping shredded willow bark in his stone pipe, he continued to stare up the tributary, narrowing his eyes in thought, it seemed, for the glare of the sun was behind him.

Gilbert had exchanged few words with him during the long flight through Acadia, and now he found no pleasure in the Lamb's company. "You paid them scanty thanks, I noticed. Though you owe them your life." Turning away, he heard Vetch's reply:

"Life? Mine was cheap—worth no more than a Mohawk's whim—or yours. I owe them little—no more than I owe yourself."

Gilbert halted and turned to face the Lamb again. For a moment they studied each other, Gilbert with unconcealed dislike, the other with veiled amusement. Sucking an unlit

pipe, Vetch seemed immune to silent rebuke, and so Gilbert spoke aloud:

"Wax impudent if you like, Vetch. But I've no mind to paddle in the same canoe. Luckily, two remain—one for you and your men, another for me and my family. Minton will come with us, since he chooses it so."

Vetch grinned, disclosing teeth that bit hard on the stem of his pipe, yet he contained his thoughts, glancing up the tributary and then toward the main stream where his Lambs were loitering near the canoes. Wilhelmina and Jem were there too, she kneeling on the beach and cutting a square from a piece of birch bark, the boy sitting astride a deadfall and watching Minton repair the birdcage with osier switches. Gilbert turned his back on Vetch and strode to the beach.

"We go ahead," he told Wilhelmina. "Why, you look troubled. Something amiss?"

"The canoe—a burst seam."

It was the one they had shared with two Mohawks and Minton. Overturned on the beach, it had been covered with frost an hour ago, but now the damp bottom was steaming in the early sun. Gilbert examined a seam in the bark, noting that a sharp rock had cut the binding and that the spruce pitch, too brittle in this cool weather, had cracked and fallen away.

"But this . . . Yesterday. . . ." Yesterday the canoe had been tight except for a small puncture at the bow above the water line. Now it would sink to the gunwales in minutes. He examined the nearby gravel, and detected a film of pitch on a jagged piece of chert, a stone alien to this beach. A suspicion quickened his pulse, and meeting Wilhelmina's eyes, he knew the cause of her worried look before she spoke:

"The pot of pitch—missing. Do you think . . .?" The hush of her words and her quick glance at the Lambs watching them from a little distance conveyed her meaning too well.

"Yes," he had to agreed. "Unless the Mohawks. . . ."

"But they had plenty—enough and to spare." She pulled an awl from her leather smock and, while Gilbert held the patch of birch bark in place, punched holes along the edges. Behind them the boy had been laughing, and now he ran to the canoe, holding the cage in his arms and bursting to share the joke:

"Ka-ka-kos-sis peck Minty's nose," he cried excitedly and pointed at Minton who followed, peeking through his fingers and feigning howls of anguish:

"Pecked out my eyes! All my ears ate up and my nose. Black devil!" Minton opened his arms wide, keeping his eyelids tight as if blinded, and grasped wildly at empty space. "Black devil! I catch you soon and pluck me a feather."

"No, no," screamed Jem, laughing and clinging to Gilbert's leggings with one hand and to the cage with the other. "Papa! Papa! Pick me up. High! High!"

Gilbert swung him to his shoulders, and while the laughing boy taunted Minton from this safe height, met Wilhelmina's eyes—eyes expressing the same fear that dimmed his own. They had brought Jem far, and now only a day's journey lay before them. Yet that short distance seemed as great, as beset with danger, as all the long route from Quebec. He put Jem down in spite of the boy's laughing protests.

And now Minton saw the bark patch, ceased threatening the crow, stood dumb while his head turned slowly toward the Lambs who were still grinning as if with lingering mirth. The boy fell to bewildered silence, his free hand seeking his father's, his candid eyes inquiring why all others stared.

Minton backed against the canoe. "Five of them," he whispered as if to himself. "I might have known." He looked at Gilbert's sheathed machete, at Wilhelmina's knife, and then at Vetch who was smoking a pipe and surveying them all from the edge of the forest. Vetch had timed his treachery well, for a shout to the Mohawks would die unheard among the muffling pines.

"Eh, Minton?" the Lamb now taunted. "Whispering? Warned them, eh? March here, or by the rood . . .!"

The incompleted oath must have conveyed a dreaded threat to Minton, for he ran at an angle across the beach and plunged into the forest. Two Lambs were after him on the instant, and for a moment the snapping branches traced their progress. Then Minton was at bay. Gilbert acted quickly now, for it soon appeared that the three remaining Lambs would not be distracted long.

"Mina," he urged. "Their canoe! Be quick."

She understood. If she understood also that he might be unable to follow her there was no protest, only an instant of hesitation as she made a mother's decision. With Jem in her arms, with Gilbert flanking her path, she ran toward the undamaged canoe while the Lambs sprang to intercept them. Machete in hand, Gilbert swung at the foremost, driving him aside, and then at Vetch whose swinging musket held him off. The third Lamb? Barely within Gilbert's range of vision, he was leaping toward the canoe which Wilhelmina was pushing out from shore. Gilbert turned that way in spite of those behind him, but his hope to divert the third Lamb was scarcely born before it expired in the thundering delirium that accompanied the grazing blow of a musket butt.

For an eternity of horrors he seemed to be struggling out of some bottomless abyss, but at last the throbbing of his temple and the aching of his bound wrists and ankles forced reality upon him. Dreading what he might see, he looked for Wilhelmina and Jem and found them lying between himself and a fire that had been kindled on the beach. Like himself, both were trussed up with leather thongs. Why? Why were they not killed at once? And why were they gagged? Because the Lambs, evil though they were, could not abide the cries of mother and child? Bitterly chastising himself for trusting the Lambs, he met Wilhelmina's gaze. She too was resigned, he thought. The anguish of utter despair gleamed

in her wet eyes as Vetch knelt over the boy and hooked a finger to catch the gold chain. He slipped the chain over Jem's head and held the seal up to the sunlight.

"Ha! The seal itself! The bauble that cost me all these months, and near my life. 'Twill stamp no letter to King William in future." He flung it toward the river. It caught on an overhanging bough, swung back and forth on its chain, and dropped to the beach near the birdcage.

The crow was thrusting its head out of the cage. Its obsidian eyes sparkled with a devilish cunning as horrible as the cruelty in Vetch's black pupils, and for an instant Gilbert loathed that crow even as much as he had loathed the crows of England which had cleaned the bones of so many rebels there. Vetch, too, despised crows, Jem's in particular, and now he strode to the cage and kicked it with the sole of his moccasin. It tumbled away, a squawking, thumping, thrashing thing of life. The crippled bird squeezed out through broken plaits and half ran, half flew into the undergrowth.

It was then that Vetch noticed Gilbert's opened eyes. "So, Axford, you live? 'Tis well, for now you write a letter—unless you perfer to watch them die."

Gilbert trembled in his bonds. That Vetch was promising to spare Wilhelmina and Jem was beyond credence, yet for an instant a spark burned feebly in the ashes of his hope. "Can this be? You bargain?"

"Their freedom—and yours. For a letter—proof of their deaths. That's all I want—and Roebury—not her life itself." Hovering over Gilbert, he stared down out of narrowing eyes that could not hide his thoughts. This was no subtle courtier but rather a clumsy soldier accustomed to gaining his ends by force. Gilbert recognized the perfidy. The spark within him faded. If Vetch were about to exact from him a promise to keep her out of England his mind changed as he read the distrust in Gilbert's eyes. "You refuse?"

"Since we die no matter."

"There are ways to die, Axford." Vetch watched the color drain from Gilbert's face and turned to his men. "Put brands to the fire," he ordered, inspecting the contents of a steaming pot the smelled of hemlock bark. He stirred it and withdrew a stick dyed red. "More bark, and boil it down. 'Twill make fair ink."

Two Lambs jumped to his bidding, one to hack at pine branches, the other to gather hemlock bark. The suffering crow was squawking in the underbrush; and other crows, flapping and wheeling low over the trees, were calling to the injured tone, swooping and veering away, as is the habit of their kind.

"Crows, eh?" Vetch watched several birds settle in a tree above the place where Minton's unseen body lay.

"Aye," a Lamb agreed, guessing Vetch's meaning. "Quills a-plenty." He primed a musket and sighted at the birds, but Vetch knocked the barrel aside.

"Not with a musket, Krake! That crippled bird will do."

Krake stalked into the forest. In raucous alarm the crows in the tree took wing. Soon, undoubtedly before the end of this morning, those carrion eaters would descend to a feast of human flesh. Gilbert quailed within himself as he imagined those very birds tearing at Wilhelmina's face and picking out Jem's sightless eyes. Was there no way to ease their lot? Struggling again in his bonds, he knew that to do Vetch's bidding would be to hasten their deaths, and yet he knew too that he would acquiesce, would put quill to birch bark, would write as willed if the Lambs threatened to torture Jem and Wilhelmina. And Vetch would think of that. The cunning of the monster! What a tale he would bear to the king! An imponderable surge of hate overcame Gilbert as he imagined Vetch relating the long flight from Quebec to Deerfield, how he had defended Wilhelmina from savage assaults night and day only to lose her in the end.

The injured crow had ceased its noise, though others still

circled in the sky, calling to distant mates that called in turn. Men heaped fuel under the steaming pot, filled it with hemlock bark, and laid brands near the fire. Krake returned with a limp mass of black plumage, extracted several quills, and tossed the dead bird into the fire where it sizzled and stank of burning feathers and flesh.

A kick thudded hard against the hollow of Gilbert's back. He rolled away to avoid another blow and found Vetch standing above him.

"So, Axford, you still refuse?" It was a sneer, in itself a mere question, but ominous with ugly implications. He motioned to the Lambs. "Drag his bastard under his nose."

Krake hooked a hand in the thongs about Jem's ankles and fairly slithered him to Gilbert's face.

"Your heir, Axford." Motioning again, Vetch sucked on his stone pipe while a Lamb dragged Wilhelmina to Gilbert's side. "And your mistress!" He laughed cruelly, leering down at them and stroking his beard as if devising some devilish torture. Then he began talking, at first reminding them of the future that might have been, of Roebury in Wiltshire, of the stables there, the fields, the sympathy and pardon extended by the king.

"Roebury," he gloated presently, "will still be mine. Ah, Milady, you would ask how I located you? Too long a tale—but the same as his." He kicked at Gilbert. "Except, of course, I went to Quebec by ship—and arrived as soon, or soon enough. . . ."

How long Vetch spoke Gilbert did not know. His heart and mind and soul had reached the saturation point of suffering, and the revolting monologue could add nothing to his anguish. There were detailed explanations concerning Roebury and the king and Vetch himself, but none of it made an impression on him now. Yet he knew that time was passing, that already the ink in the simmering pot was thick enough for use. A sheet of birch bark had been prepared, the

quills sharpened, and brands applied to the coals. Yes, time was short. Vetch had ceased talking, and now the Lambs removed the pot from the fire. The stick they had used to stir the liquid was dyed a purplish brown.

"Well, Axford! Do you still refuse?" Without waiting for an answer, Vetch directed the Lambs to sever the thongs that bound his hands. "A brand, Krake."

Sitting up, feeling the circulation returning to his hands, Gilbert saw Krake remove the glowing stub of a pine branch from the fire. Shaped much like a snake, it hissed with burning resin and spurted a tongue of red flame. Krake gave it to Vetch who pointed it at Jem's head.

"Free the boy's mouth—and hers. Let Axford hear them."

Jem burst into piteous cries as the suffocating furs were removed from his lips. With numbed hands Gilbert fumbled at his ankle bonds, but even before two Lambs grasped his arms he realized the futility of struggling.

"Have pity," he cried. "Before God, I'll write as you will it. Leave him be!"

Vetch let the firebrand tilt down toward the beach. "So?" he triumphed, taking no care to hide his satisfaction. "With a steady hand?"

To write with a steady hand was outside his power, but Gilbert reached for the quill and looked up at Vetch who sought appropriate words to dictate. Beyond the Lambs a score of crows, as if disturbed by some animal, were flying out of the trees, cawing in protest, yet circling near. All else was quiet save Wilhelmina's voice, hoarse from the effects of stifling furs recently dislodged. Even Jem, wailing a moment ago, was silently listening to his mother. Gilbert caught her words:

"Yes, Jemmy—angels. Black angels in the sky. See? Mama is not afraid. . . ." Tears dimmed her eyes, but her lips were smiling. The sight of her comforting their child, comforting

him in these last remaining minutes of life, tore at Gilbert's emotions, enlivened those senses numbed by too much torment. He could not bear the sight, and looked away—at Vetch, speechless and rigid, staring at the crows as if they were angels indeed, avenging angels preparing to swoop down from the sky. A strange tension fell over the Lambs, and whispered phrases, husky with indescribable fear, all at once interrupted the breathless silence:

"The crows. Those caws. The Mohawk signal."

Whether the sudden war whoops caused the Lambs to run, or whether their spontaneous flight induced the hidden Mohawks to attack at once, Gilbert was never to know. So great was his relief that he scarcely watched the race for the canoe, the confusion in the river, the sweep of knife and hatchet. The engagement was brief. Outnumbered and ill prepared, the Lambs fell quickly, splashing in the water or screaming for mercy. In a moment the striving ceased.

The weakness of reaction possessed Gilbert's body. Dazed, the yells of the Mohawks still ringing in his ears, he had no strength—not even the power to pick up a knife and to cut the thongs about his ankles. For a while he could only stare in exultation at Wilhelmina, lying there yet and smiling, and at Jem, already released from his bonds, trying his legs.

The Mohawks were busy. Two of the Lambs were still alive—Krake and Vetch. Pleading for mercy, they were struggling with the savages who, for want of ready thongs, were using those cut from Wilhelmina, himself, and Jem. The Lambs were not to be gagged, for Mohawks took little satisfaction in mute victims. Indeed Vetch's pleas intensified as he saw the fire blazing higher; and so Gilbert hurried his family into the undamaged canoe.

There was an exchange of farewells, and then Wilhelmina, Jem and Gilbert set out for Deerfield. The canoe was scarcely under way when Vetch's desperate pleas altered to screams.

Sitting near the bow, Wilhelmina trailed her paddle in the eddies.

"Don't look back," Gilbert told her and Jem. He knew that they had viewed Malisete barbarities, but the Mohawk methods were such as no woman or child should witness. He drove his paddle deep into the water and stroked forcefully. The canoe leaped downstream. Behind them the screams weakened with ever increasing distance, and presently they were alone, gliding silently between low banks covered with the naked trees and dried reeds of a dead season.

Thus they might have continued, might have warmed themselves by paddling, but Jem was shivering in the bottom of the canoe, shielding his face against the river breeze. Gilbert saw, saw too a beckoning cove where windfalls offered shelter and fuel. A fire would cheer the boy. As for himself, he needed no such warmth. The chills of remembered horrors had pierced him for a while, but other thoughts had burned those recollections from his mind, and now his blood was coursing with the excitement that comes of aspirations won.

"Time to rest," he said, twisting the blade of his paddle under water and so turning the canoe off course.

Wilhelmina heard, and let her paddle drag. "Rest?" she mused silently. "Yes, it's time." It was only an hour since they had begun this last part of the journey, and she was far from tired. Yet Gilbert's suggestion, impinging on memories of burdened years, seemed as pointed as it would have been if her arms had been aching. She swept her paddle in a wide arc that swung the bow across the current. They landed at the cove, and cooked a pot of meal, and afterwards sat on a log before the fire. They talked now, now that the tension of an hour ago was broken, talked of their life together that was to be. The boy was lamenting the loss of his pet crow, but in a little while he would forget Ka-ka-kos-sis; and even now he became silent, squirmed between his mother and

father, and took an interest in their words as they hung the seal about his neck. The boy did not understand those words, but one day he would remember them and understand them and pass them down with the gold relic.

LADY IN BONDAGE

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